

UNCERTAIN KNOWLEDGE

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Scepticism, Relativism, and Doubt
in the Middle Ages

Edited by

Dallas G. Denery II, Kantik Ghosh,
and Nicolette Zeeman



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INTRODUCTION: THE VARIETIES OF UNCERTAINTY

Nicolette Zeeman, Kantik Ghosh, and Dallas G. Denery II

In recent years, an interest in medieval articulations of scepticism and doubt has made itself manifest in several different areas of medieval studies; and yet little sustained conversation on this topic has occurred between scholars in these different disciplines. This volume therefore brings together medievalists working in a variety of subjects,¹ but all interested in the history of ideas.² We will be investigating the articulations of uncertain knowledge as they appear in scholastic philosophy, but also in a variety of other milieux, institutional and non-institutional, ecclesiastical and lay, Latin and vernacular; we will be examining not only philosophical writings, but also historical, political, polemical, and literary texts. Our primary (though not exclusive) focus will be on philosophical, not religious, uncertainty — that is, on doubt in the realm of epistemology rather than faith.³

This is not just a question of dialogue (or the lack thereof) between modern scholars; we also want to know whether medieval thinkers were themselves in any kind of dialogue with each other on this topic. Ultimately, we

¹ The essays arise out of an interdisciplinary research project and workshop held at King's College, Cambridge (7–9 April 2011), and supported by funds from the British Academy, the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge and King's College itself.

² Described by Mishtooni Bose as a 'materialist intellectual history', which traces the 'formation and transmission of ideas within and across different milieux, always with particular, situated human beings as the agents of such processes', in Bose, 'The Intellectual History of the Middle Ages', p. 103.

³ Important recent work on doubt in the realm of faith includes: Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe*; and Weltecke, 'Der Narr spricht'; also Flanagan, *Doubt in an Age of Faith*.

hope to understand more about how institutionally produced philosophy in Latin, itself polyvocal and conflict-ridden, might have interacted with the wider range of discourse produced outside these institutions. In this book, we will be addressing not only the expression of various forms of scepticism and doubt, but also the espousal of alternative forms of understanding, in lay and vernacular contexts. We will be asking fundamental questions about the conceptual and institutional frameworks within which philosophy was practised, and the consequences of this for our larger understanding of medieval philosophical thought and for medieval culture as a whole.

Historians of philosophy have long argued that, subsequent to Augustine's repudiation of the 'Academics' in his *Contra academicos*, scepticism was not acknowledged as a fully fledged philosophical position until the discovery of scepticism-inducing Classical authors such as Lucretius and Sextus Empiricus in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁴ Indeed, until quite recently, in so far as sceptical tendencies were recognized in later medieval philosophy, they were associated with some kind of decline or 'dissolution' of a previous consensus about the possibility of a shared philosophical and theological enterprise.⁵ And of course, even now scholarship that recognizes the manifestations of uncertainty in the Middle Ages often may still assume that 'faith' is the inevitable fallback position.

However, it has recently been suggested that there were a number of routes whereby some later medieval thinkers could in fact know something about antique scepticism.⁶ With the mid-twentieth-century controversy concerning the alleged scepticism of Ockham and the so-called 'Nominalists' having long since been put to rest, moreover, in recent decades historians have turned their attention to how medieval thinkers used sceptical arguments and modes of thought as critical tools for clarifying what can be known within the context of reliabilist epistemological and cognitive theories.⁷ The early fourteenth-

⁴ For some influential accounts, see Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*; Floridi, *Sextus Empiricus*. For a recent provocative contribution, see Greenblatt, *The Swerve*.

⁵ See, for example, the collected papers in Michalski, *La Philosophie au XIV^e siècle*; Leff, *The Dissolution of the Medieval Outlook*. Recent works that assume some form of the dissolution model include Taylor, *A Secular Age*; Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*; Dupré, *Passage to Modernity*.

⁶ See Maclean, 'The "Sceptical Crisis" Reconsidered'.

⁷ Debates concerning Ockham's alleged scepticism pitted the likes of Etienne Gilson and Anton Pegis against Philotheus Boehner and Sebastien Day (both of whom defended Ockham against the charge of scepticism). For a concise summary of the debate, see Adams, *William*

century Franciscan Peter Aureol believed examples of visual error (when, for example, a straight stick appears broken or bent when partially submerged in water) revealed the hidden workings of human vision, and, in the 1340s, Nicholas of Autrecourt argued that sceptical arguments were essential for helping us properly to frame our claims to know the world.⁸ Despite this fascination with sceptical arguments, no medieval thinker (with the interesting exception of John of Salisbury, who professed devotion to the Academics in the Prologue to his *Policraticus*) appears to have claimed the mantle of sceptic. On the contrary, they gleefully accused and condemned one another's theories of having sceptical consequences as the endpoint of the most unacceptable kind of *reductio ad absurdum*.⁹ Scepticism was, in a sense, everywhere and nowhere, always present in someone else's work, never in one's own. This dynamic, far from producing an unquestioning consensus about the forms and practices of certain philosophical knowledge, actually provided the tools for querying, and in many cases for narrowing, the domain of what could be known with any confidence.

Several of the contributors to this volume analyse the ways in which the institutions of scholasticism accommodated forms of uncertainty and what the disciplinary and methodological forms and limits of such accommodations might be. Eileen Sweeney argues for the problematic impact on early scholasticism of Aristotelian standards for certainty as found in the *Posterior Analytics*; the result was, she says, a two-tiered system of knowledge — that which was thought to meet, and that which was thought not to meet, the scientific standard of certainty. Dominik Perler considers the problem of sensory illusion in the work of Walter Chatton and William Ockham; acknowledging that both these thinkers took these illusions seriously, Perler, in line with his earlier work, continues to argue that they framed their understanding of these illusions within a naturalist and reliabilist theory of knowledge that ultimately excluded radical scepticism. Christophe Grellard examines the gap between scientific and common knowledge in the work of an early fourteenth-century

Ockham, I, 588–629. The now standard overview of fourteenth-century epistemology is Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham*. On medieval reliabilism's creative and critical use of scepticism, see Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit*; Grellard, *Croire et savoir*; Lagerlund, ed., *Rethinking the History of Skepticism*. For a study of scholastic discussions of moral uncertainty and scepticism, see Schüssler, *Moral im Zweifel*, I, 29–112.

⁸ On Peter Aureol, see Denery II, *Seeing and Being Seen*, pp. 117–36. On Nicholas of Autrecourt, see Grellard, *Croire et savoir*, pp. 257–82 and Denery II, 'Nicolas of Autrecourt on Saving the Appearance'.

⁹ See Grellard, 'Scepticism, Demonstration and the Infinite Regress Argument'.

Arts Master, John Buridan. Although Buridan thought that judgement was in normal circumstances true, he also believed that, over time, the intellect can become habituated to make false judgements. According to him, the passions, a bad education, and the power of imagination are factors which can lead the intellect to be mistaken. Buridan explores this slide into error using the widespread and influential philosophical figure of false belief, the *vetula* (the little old woman).

Uncertainty was also articulated in other scholastic disciplines and practices. Rita Copeland, for instance, explores the intellectual implications of medieval debates about the position of the *Rhetoric* within Aristotle's corpus: was it logic or ethics? The apparently clear boundaries of rhetoric as a science, and indeed scientific classification, were unsettled by the appearance and incorporation of this text, so very different from the Latin rhetorics already possessed in the West. Even scholastic biblical commentators acknowledged uncertainty in their work. Lesley Smith shows that biblical exegetes recognized the insecurity of the scriptural text itself and also expressed doubt about the methods available for its exposition, and the questions and answers that could be drawn from it. Investigations into early and late scholasticism, then, confirm that its epistemological techniques and practices were simultaneously stimulated and potentially compromised by questions about their own security and efficacy.

But the remit of this book is wider than the history of institutional scholasticism. As part of this larger remit, we need to recognize the relationship between medieval disciplinary method and the institutions within which it occurs.¹⁰ Did the fact that most of what is called medieval philosophy was practised by vocational and institutionally based 'philosophers' within institutions of education and learning, subject to various kinds and degrees of ecclesiastical support and control, delimit the terms of medieval philosophy, or not? What does it mean for there to be no work recognized as 'philosophical' outside of this context?¹¹ How does such institutional philosophy relate to other 'sciences' and disciplinary practices elsewhere in the schools? And what is its relation to the intellectual work composed outside the schools and universities altogether, including 'literary' texts written in various vernaculars? The purpose of asking such questions is not to invoke the tired binarism whereby the institu-

¹⁰ In this context, see Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris*: a major emphasis of Wei's scholarship is on 'the relationship between ways of thinking and contexts' (p. 1).

¹¹ Though see the recent intervention by Imbach and König-Pralong, *Le Défi laïque: Existe-t-il une philosophie de laïcs au Moyen Âge?*

tions of scholasticism are imagined to be a site of hegemony and the monologic, in contrast to a version of ‘popular’ culture constructed as diverse, critical, and iconoclastic: scholastic practice is remarkably self-questioning and in constant debate about its own, often sceptically inflected, analytic methods. Our purpose is rather to ask how different milieux enabled different forms of thought and articulation, and, therefore, almost certainly different ways of tackling questions about knowing. We seek to show that those who may have found it liberating to perform intellectual work at a distance from the institutions of scholasticism also deserve a prominent place in modern intellectual historiography.

Many contributors to this book therefore look outside those intellectual enterprises we have been referring to collectively as ‘scholasticism’.¹² Some of their contributions should be read in relation to recent studies in the history of the church, religious dissent, heresy, and the politics of vernacular religious language; such bodies of thought and textuality bring with them a long tradition of challenging scholastically — and ecclesiastically — authorized notions about the categories of what might be thought to be securely known.¹³ However, as we have said, the primary focus of this volume is not religious, but philosophical, uncertainty. For this reason, a central part of our project is to bring medieval philosophy into dialogue with a number of other contemporary discourses that impinge on the philosophical enterprise — these will include texts that exemplify political, polemical, secular, lay, and even literary forms of inquiry.

It has, for instance, long been a commonplace of historians of scepticism that the politics of Early Modern society played a part in the ‘rediscovery’ of the Early Modern sceptical subject after the Middle Ages. But several essays in this volume insist that medieval society and its institutions also had an appreciable impact on the sceptical thought of the period; they sample various secular, lay, and political writings (with varying degrees of clerical affiliation) that play a role in the articulation of, and in the expression of anxiety about, medieval doubt, scepticism, and ‘other’ knowing. Dallas Denery, for example, compares the expressions of Early Modern political and social epistemological uncertainty with John of Salisbury’s anxieties about the social obfuscation and pru-

¹² See on this subject Quinto, *Scholastica*.

¹³ See, as a starting-point, Rubin and Simons, eds, *Christianity in Western Europe c. 1100–c. 1500*, Parts VI and VII. For some exemplary studies focusing on these issues specifically in England, see: Watson, ‘Conceptions of the Word’; Watson, ‘Visions of Inclusion’; *The Idea of the Vernacular*, ed. by Wogan-Browne and others; Gillespie, ‘Vernacular Theology’; Johnson, ‘Vernacular Theology/Theological Vernacular’; Copeland, *Pedagogy, Intellectuals and Dissent*; Ghosh, *The Wycliffite Heresy*.

dential deception endemic in twelfth-century political life. This trans-historical comparison importantly suggests that the philosophico-political discourses of uncertainty are in fact available throughout the whole intervening period of the 'high' Middle Ages. In the context of this concern with political rhetoric, of course, we have already noted Copeland's essay on the uncertain categorization of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, with its doubt-inducing implications for logic and politics alike.

Towards the end of our period, freer attitudes towards controversy, and a recognition that religio-political debate drawing on learned discourses was no longer the exclusive prerogative of the world of the university, posed new questions about how reason and faith ought to engage with intellectual experimentation — and also gave new prominence to the category of 'opinion'. Mishtooni Bose compares the 'vernacular opinions' of the female intellectual and poet Christine de Pizan with those of Bishop Reginald Pecock, philosopher/theologian and controversialist who chose to write in the vernacular. Bose claims that they both derive a distinctive authorial capital from adopting an amphibious position between lay and clerkly worlds, with the category of vernacular opinion allowing them to represent the wide range of alternative conceptual and rhetorical postures by which they sought to instigate the reformation of the reader. Equally importantly, vernacular opinion here serves to link two very different areas of textual and cultural activity, that of learned religio-political discourse and popular controversy. Kantik Ghosh notes another, and rather different, result of the greater porosity of the domains of academic speculative theology and extramural religio-political conflict in this period: in place of long-standing academic procedures for the examination and control of controversial intellectual practices with a pronounced sceptical dimension, there was an increased use of inquisitorial techniques, developed for the prosecution of 'heresy'. Ghosh's case studies of the 'policing' of a number of early fifteenth-century speculative ventures suggest that the risk of experimental thinkers being categorized as 'heretics' was in this period much increased, and the entire enterprise of the scholastic logical study of divinity fundamentally compromised.

A number of essays in the volume address the philosophical literary — that is figured, fictional, and 'imaginative' — text. Literary scholars have long recognized the presence of doubting and sceptical attitudes to what can be known and how it can be articulated in these kinds of textuality. Indeed, we suggest that a fairly wide consensus on this point stands in some contrast to the more cautious positions adopted both by most medieval scholastic philosophers and the majority of their modern historians. Some medieval literary works (especially, but not exclusively, those written in the vernaculars) seem

to be constructed in counterpoint to the 'authoritative' writings of the church and schools, revisiting issues on which the authorities of Church, the Law, and University sought to hold relatively firm views and even legislative positions — questions of politics, class, gender, psychology, intentionality, thought, desire, fantasy, and the marvellous, to name but a few.¹⁴ For this reason, the medieval imaginative text can sometimes be defined in terms of an evasive, sceptical, and doubting posture — that is, its countenancing of other modes of knowing through the construction of alternative epistemes. These other modes of knowing are no doubt partly the result of the way that the imaginative text foregrounds its use of discursive forms different from those of scholastic philosophy — its use of figurative and rhetorical modes (narrative, ecphrasis, metaphor, irony, humour, rhetorical colouration and *conjointure*, etc.), and also its emphasis on, and exploitation of, the various subject positions of the author and audience, the complexity of the literary inheritance, and the multiplicity of literary genres and forms. If the oblique, partial, querying or knowingly compromised manoeuvre is a crucial characterizing feature of the literary text, this means that in its very form it blazons its alternative discursive and philosophical approaches to the question of what can and cannot be known and articulated.¹⁵ This foregrounding of formal concerns may mean that the medieval literary text is particularly (though of course by no means exclusively) amenable to the kinds of epistemological questions and deferrals that have so preoccupied twentieth- and twenty-first-century critical theory and, even more recently, animal studies: quite apart from its own extensive intellectual and cultural implications, and the way that it has placed the previous philosophical inheritance under query, such work has done a great deal to re-situate questions of literary form within a framework that is recognizably philosophical, if also avowedly differently so.

As a result, the 'situatedness' of the literary text¹⁶ will to some extent take a distinctive position within our discussions of medieval doubt and scepticism, given its operation in a modality very different from the analytic and disputative engagement with uncertainty found in scholastic discourses: in many

¹⁴ See, for instance, Wei, *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Paris*, pp. 356–414.

¹⁵ Good starting points in this huge field include: Olson, 'Making and Poetry in the Age of Chaucer'; Cerquiglini-Toulet, '*Un Engin si subtil*'; Kelly, *The Art of Medieval French Romance; Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Minnis and Scott; Zeeman, 'The Schools Give a License to Poets'; Minnis and Johnson, eds, *The Middle Ages; Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, pp. 28–51; Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*.

¹⁶ Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, p. 199.

respects, the imaginative text emblemizes the richness of medieval articulations of uncertain knowledge. Nevertheless, most of the literary case studies found in this volume exemplify instances where the literary text is, in its own way, recognizably attempting to engage with the discourses of the schools. Textual and conceptual difference does not preclude the possibility that 'interdisciplinary' dialogue is indeed taking place. The problem, however, may be recognizing this when it occurs: given the bias of the literary text away from the analytic language and agonistic method of the schools, not to mention the various theoretical nuancings of modern readings of the literary text, its expressions of epistemological doubt may, from a traditional philosophical perspective, be hard to see.

In this volume, then, Karen Sullivan discusses the marvellous in Robert de Boron's thirteenth-century romance *Merlin*. Sullivan claims that it is Merlin himself who embodies this category — neither demonic nor divine, and inassimilable into the binary structures of some medieval theologico-scientific ways of thinking. According to her, this romance, along with its preoccupation with the forms of human deception, reveals that one cannot place trust in human understanding, and that this in itself constitutes a kind of understanding. Helen Swift considers psychology in the late medieval French love *dits* of Jean Froissart and Alain Chartier. She claims that these courtly poets think of the emotional agitation of love, and in particular love's doubts and hopes, in epistemological terms. For the conflicted lovers of these poems, 'the merit of not knowing', the wilful cultivation of hope and uncertainty, ensures that everything still remains possible; it turns out therefore to be preferable to many forms of certain knowledge. According to Swift, such love poetry is thus the great deferrer of unwelcome certain knowledge. Nicolette Zeeman investigates a different manoeuvre whereby Jean de Meun, Chaucer, and Chaucer's successors throw philosophical or theological systems into question. She proposes that these poets adopt an implicitly sceptical position by attributing primacy to certain 'lower' elements or parts within an inherited and hierarchical philosophical system (such as that associated with nature and fortune), but without overtly repudiating the system itself. The sceptical implications of this manoeuvre derive partly from the refusal to provide an alternative system that would explain the altered emphasis, but also from the unspoken question as to whether such an overarching theoretical structure is either necessary or even possible.

Perceptible differences of approach to the question of uncertain knowledge emerge from the historical disciplines of philosophy and literary studies in the course of this volume. Whereas the former often clarifies the pervasively sceptical technical practices of medieval scholastic epistemology, but nevertheless

tends to situate them in relation to a broadly reliabilist viewpoint, the latter tends to be more interested in the ways that epistemological uncertainty might be reflected in the difficulties and limitations of its own articulation. These differences are exemplified in our two concluding essays. Hester Gelber charts a fourteenth-century, Latin-English engagement between the Dominican philosopher Robert Holcot and the English poet Geoffrey Chaucer. She argues that, while both held deeply sceptical views of the human capacity for certainty, each retained a 'cheerful' hope that human beings are not epistemologically entirely at a loss: if Holcot fell back on the principle of non-contradiction as a constraint on the potential for chaos, Chaucer's ironic depiction of human folly relied on the reader's conscience and powers to discern the humorous failings of self and other to make a path over the same unstable ground. Sarah Kay, in contrast, reads Richard de Fournival's fourteenth-century *Bestiaire d'amours* as a thought-experiment in *bêtise*, the not-quite knowledge that humans and animals share. Richard uses the format of the bestiary to compare himself, his lady, and their love, with animals and their natures; drawing on Aristotelian-derived theories about the senses, inner senses (memory, imagination, etc.), and a concomitant lack of 'sense', Kay argues that what Richard offers, both in text and also in imaginatively apprehensible images, is a radical and serious experiment to capture something of mental life below the level of thought, with, once again, disruptive implications for systematic thought *tout court*.

All of the texts discussed here complicate, problematize, or refuse 'knowledge', and the methods thought to be leading to such 'knowledge'. It seems clear that the Middle Ages found a huge variety of modes in which to express and explore epistemological doubt and uncertainty. If a good number of these complications and refusals are overt, others are expressed indirectly and even formulated as questions; indeed, it may be that they are only articulable in questioning — that is, sceptical — modes. If the formal *quaestio* was *the* scholastic intellectual method of choice,¹⁷ what characterized the literary and imaginative text was a radically rhetoricizing premise — that to change the mode of expression was to change what could be said and, therefore, known. In conclusion, we might ask whether, when the texts and discourses studied in this volume are regarded cumulatively, they constitute compelling evidence for a sceptical undercurrent that runs throughout the Middle Ages, accommodating, in a variety of ways so dazzling as to resist totalizing categories, modes of thought and feeling necessarily unable to find open or fully theorized expression.

¹⁷ See Bazàn and others, *Les Questions disputées et les questions quodlibétiques*; Schabel, ed., *Theological Quodlibeta*.

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UNCERTAINTY AND DECEPTION IN THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN COURT

Dallas G. Denery II

“The flatterer is the enemy of all virtue,” warns John of Salisbury in the *Policraticus*, a work he composed in 1159, ‘and forms as it were a cataract over the eye of him whom he engages in conversation’. With seemingly kind and encouraging words, pledges of love and fidelity, fine manners and concerned gestures, the flatterer blinds his victim, fills his ears with lies and stokes his vanity. ‘Men of this type,’ John continues, ‘always speak to give pleasure, never to tell the truth. The words in their mouths are wicked guile which, even when friends are in error, bellows Bravo! Bravo! to their undoing.’¹ And there are others lurking around the court, no less pernicious, no less evil. To the ranks of the flatterer, John adds the timeserver, the wheedler and the giftgiver, the actor and the mimic, the pervert, the procurer, and the gossip monger. The only thing that surpasses their variety, John fears, is their number, ‘for the foul inundation of their cancerous disease seeps into all so that there is rarely anyone left uncontaminated’.²

¹ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk III, ch. 4 (p. 159). John of Salisbury, *Policraticus I–IV*, ed. by Keats-Rohan, p. 179: ‘Adulator enim omnis uirtutis inimicus est et quasi clauum figit in oculo illius cum quo sermonem conserit, eo que magis cauendus est quo sub amantis specie nocere non desinit donec rationis obtundat acumen et modicum id luminis quod adesse uidebatur extinguat [...] Verba oris eius iniquitas et dolus qui etiam errantibus amicis ad eorum subuersionem ingeminat “Euge, euge”’. Unless otherwise noted, I rely on Pike’s translation. When including the Latin original, page numbers to Keats-Rohan’s edition will appear in parentheses.

² John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk III, ch. 6 (p. 166).

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Perhaps John exaggerates. The history of social commentary all too often seems like little more than the history of fears and proclamations that the current generation has gone to seed, that corruption runs rampant and morals have decayed beyond any hope of redemption. In the 1520s, some three hundred and fifty years after John despaired of his contemporaries, Baldesar Castiglione would blame the elderly for this tendency to believe that 'all things imaginable are always moving from bad to worse'. Why? 'For myself', Castiglione writes in *The Book of the Courtier*, 'I think that the reason for this faulty judgement in the old is that the passing years rob them of the favourable conditions of life.'³ As our bodies and minds wither, the world around us seems to wither as well. Whether aged or not (John was in his late thirties with more than half his life still ahead of him when he composed *The Policraticus*), John's observations should be taken seriously, as he was as well placed as anyone during his life to observe the 'frivolities' or 'non-sense' of the courtiers. An emissary for kings and popes, not to mention a fervent letter writer who ended his days as the bishop of Chartres, there can be little doubt that John was intimately acquainted with the nature of medieval court life, its forms and foibles, its pleasures and poisons and, especially, its temptations.⁴ 'The most dangerous situation [...] that men of eminence have to face', John writes at the very beginning of the first chapter of the first book of the *Policraticus*, 'lies in the fact that the enticements of fawning fortune blind their eyes to truth. The world heaps upon them its wealth and its pleasures and thereby kindles and fosters their craving for self-indulgence. The soul, deceived by allurements of many kinds, proving false to its own inner light, by a sort of self-betrayal goes astray as the result of its desires amid the deceptions of the outer world.'⁵

³ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. by Bull, p. 107.

⁴ For an overview of John's life, see Nederman, *John of Salisbury*, pp. 1–39.

⁵ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk I, ch. 1 (p. 11 (27)): 'Inter omnia quae uiris solent obesse principibus, nichil perniciosius esse arbitror quam quod eis fortunae blandientis illecebra aspectum subtrahit ueritatis, dum diuitias suas et delicias congerit mundus, quibus delicati sensus pruriginem uicissim refouet et accendit, ut animus multiplici lenociniorum fraude captus, quadam alienatione sui ab interiore bono deficiens per exteriora mendacia uariis concupiscentiis euagetur'. John was hardly alone in thinking he lived in an age of decline, see Jaeger, 'Pessimism in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance'.

Early Modern Uncertainty

How should a person, John's 'man of eminence', respond to a situation of rampant illusion and uncertainty? This is an important question to ask, and not simply because it is the subject of the *Policraticus* and, therefore, a key piece of evidence in our evaluation of twelfth-century intellectual culture. It is important because the response to uncertainty functions as a central explanatory device in popular and enduring accounts of Europe's transition from a medieval or pre-modern to an Early Modern society. According to these varied interpretations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the origins of European modernity depend in large part upon how people reacted to the spectre of uncertainty and scepticism, the result of a widespread crisis of confidence in which long held religious, cultural and scientific institutions and beliefs had become unstable, even untenable.⁶ Members of the Early Modern court were hardly immune to these pressures, and scholars have long wondered about the rather cheerful tone of Castiglione's great work, even as his characters discuss the ominous consequences of life in the newly emerging absolutist states.⁷

While René Descartes famously believed certainty to be the only cure for uncertainty, many Early Modern Europeans simply accepted uncertainty as an unavoidable feature of our lives. If Descartes turned to philosophy to rid himself of doubt, others turned to rhetoric and dialectic as a means of accommodating themselves to an all too confusing world.⁸ In a series of lectures from the 1570s on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the Oxford scholar John Rainolds argues that we must reject the Aristotelian notion of scientific demonstration based on first principles because we possess few, if any, real first principles. Proponents of Aristotle, Rainolds writes, 'wish a demonstrative proof to be understood with reference to nature, not to us'. The problem, Rainolds contends, is one of perspective. By demanding that knowledge must begin with necessary first principles,

⁶ Studies concerning the response of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European thinkers and writers to uncertainty are too numerous to list in full. Rabb, *The Struggle for Stability* is still a valuable entry point. Among recent works I have found helpful are Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*, Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, Farrell, *Paranoia and Modernity*, and Harries, *Infinity and Perspective*. The classic work on Early Modern scepticism remains Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, although he undervalues the importance of earlier medieval debates. For correctives, see Lagerlund, ed., *Rethinking the History of Skepticism* and Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit*.

⁷ Javitch, 'Il Cortegiano and the Constraints of Despotism'.

⁸ Kahn, *Rhetoric, Prudence and Skepticism*, pp. 19–28.

Aristotelians fail to consider the real limitations that frame and condition our attempts to know the world. 'Being men with wits enslaved to error', Rainolds argues, 'we scarcely know what might be "first principles", "unmediated terms", and "necessary propositions" for ourselves, much less for nature'. The evidence of our confusion is everywhere, he adds, just look at the disagreements between the Sceptics, the Epicureans, and the Pythagoreans.⁹ For Rainolds, dialectics replaces demonstration precisely because the rules and tools of rhetoric provide the individual with a means for evaluating and selecting among the competing choices that confront us in our lives. 'Rhetoric', Rainolds reminds his readers, does not create probabilities, but instead perceives them.¹⁰

Rhetoric may have provided the analytic and interpretive tools, but it was prudence, the practical intellect, that put those tools to use. Rainolds argues that prudence can apply dialectical techniques to practically any question and even the most summary review of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature reveals that he was not alone in this belief. The French sceptic Pierre Charron argues that prudence 'is a general guide and conduct of the other virtues, and of our whole life [...] in a word, the art of our life, as physic the art of our health'.¹¹ A good thing this was too, as our uncertainty about things extended far beyond the confines of natural philosophy. '[O]bserve how all mankind are made up of falsehood and deceit, of tricks and lies', Charron writes in his most famous work, *On Wisdom*, 'how unfaithful and dangerous, how full of disguise and design all conversation is at present become, but especially, how much more it abounds near [the prince], and how manifestly hypocrisy and dissimulation are the reigning qualities of prince's courts'. Given 'the great uncertainty and inconstancy of human affairs', the fickleness of human nature, and 'the inexpressible variety of accidents, circumstances, appurtenances, dependencies and consequences, the difference of times and places and persons' that constantly surround and confront us, there can be few hard and fast rules to guide our conduct, few principles on which we can always rely.¹² In such circumstances, demonstration gives way to dialectic and it is left to prudence, Charron contends, to determine when we ought to follow 'established laws and customs in

⁹ Rainolds, *Oxford Lectures on Aristotle's 'Rhetoric'*, ed. and trans. by Green, p. 205.

¹⁰ Rainolds, *Oxford Lectures on Aristotle's 'Rhetoric'*, ed. and trans. by Green, p. 161.

¹¹ Cited in Pender, 'The Open Use of Living', p. 384. Pender also discusses John Rainolds. The quoted passage can be found at Charron, *Of Wisdom*, trans. by Stanhope, Bk III, ch. 1 (p. 2). I have silently modernized the spelling.

¹² Charron, *Of Wisdom*, trans. by Stanhope, Bk III, ch. 2 (p. 21).

common use' and when we will be 'obliged to go off the beaten road, and have recourse to difficult stratagems and unusual methods'.¹³

In *The Book of the Courtier*, Castiglione would offer similar advice for similar reasons. Modelling his own dialogue on Cicero's sceptically tinged *The Orator*, Castiglione leads his characters through a series of conversations that, in true rhetorical fashion, consider every question from both sides, generating doubt and a general distrust of first principles and dogmatic positions. Before embarking on his depiction of the ideal courtier, Count Ludovico warns that 'to recognize true perfection in anything is so difficult as to be scarcely possible; and this is because the way of opinions vary'.¹⁴ When it comes to questions of aesthetics, morals, and ethics, not only do different people prefer different things, but even changing circumstances require different responses. During the second evening of discussion among the guests at the Court of Urbino, Federico advises that 'in everything he does or says' the perfect courtier should follow 'certain general rules'. If he hopes to succeed, 'he should consider well what he does or says, the place where he does it, in whose presence, its timing, why he is doing it, his own age, his profession, the end he is aiming at, and the means that are suitable'.¹⁵ Only through these careful dialectical and prudential calculations will the courtier be able to act in the most pleasing, the most useful and most beneficial manner.

Beneficial for whom? The importance of Early Modern Europe's rhetorical turn, historians contend, depends on how sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers answered this question. Machiavelli's response is the most infamous, but he is really only the very representative tip of the proverbial iceberg. Machiavelli's valorisation of a prudential politics is but one example of a seeming separation of prudence, not only from its traditional religious, but even its ethical moorings.¹⁶ Confronted with the vagaries of fortune and a fickle and

¹³ Charron, *Of Wisdom*, trans. by Stanhope, Bk III, ch. 1 (pp. 7–8).

¹⁴ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. by Bull, Bk 1 (p. 53). On Castiglione's scepticism and debt to Cicero, see Kolsky, 'The Limits of Knowledge', who notes the sceptical basis of Ludovico's comments. Commenting the value of a sceptical attitude for the courtier, Kolsky writes, p. 30, 'The courtier cannot depend upon absolutes in the theatre of the court where change and mutability are key factors in determining behaviour'. See also Richards, 'Assumed Simplicity and the Critique of Nobility'.

¹⁵ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. by Bull, p. 115. Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*, discusses the immense influence of Castiglione's work.

¹⁶ Recent discussions of this transformation in prudence include Pender, 'The Open Use of Living', pp. 379–80, and Martin, 'Inventing Sincerity, Refashioning Prudence', pp. 1323–26.

deceitful populace, the prince must act in his own self-interest and this might require dissimulation, hypocrisy, and lies. Life in the court was no different, and behind the urbane conversations of Castiglione's noble men and women is a constant awareness that the court is a dangerous, deceptive, and competitive place. In this atmosphere, prudence becomes a tool of self-protection and self-interest, demarcating ever more clearly the courtier from his surroundings, his inner thoughts and intentions from his outward performance. Dissimulating one's thoughts, parrying dangerous and intrusive questions with ambiguous or witty responses, is the stock-and-trade of the successful courtier. In *The Book of the Courtier*, Gaspare Pallavicino fears that Federico reduces the courtier to a liar. Federico does little to dispel these concerns adding that 'even if it is deception it is not to be censured'.¹⁷

And so it is that historians trace a path that moves from uncertainty to probability and from prudence to deception, leading us inexorably into a modernity that privileges the interior over the exterior, the individual over the community, while ever more clearly demarcating our involvements in this world from our spiritual hopes for the next. All of this is well and good, but even if salvation was never too far from his thoughts, John of Salisbury had traced a similar path from uncertainty to probability and from prudence to deception in the *Policraticus* some several hundred years earlier.

John of Salisbury's Courtly Scepticism

For all his well-known Aristotelian proclivities, John frames the *Policraticus* within a decidedly Platonic description of the court, invoking a dualism that compares the individual's relationship to the court with the soul's relationship to the body. John's use of Plato is hardly systematic and he adopts few, if any, of the philosopher's epistemological or metaphysical ideas. Rather, he exploits Plato's dualism as a means of highlighting the dynamics and dangers of court life. Just as the soul can all too easily lose itself to sensations, mistaking passing pleasures and fleeting joys for what is truly good, John argues, so too can the unwary individual all too easily lose himself to the false delights of the court. In the *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, Macrobius, citing Plato's *Phaedo*,

¹⁷ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. by Bull, pp. 149–50. The literature on Renaissance conceptions of prudence and dissimulation is enormous, some particularly useful recent works include Snyder, *Dissimulation and the Culture of Secrecy*, Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism*, and Cavaillé, *Dis/simulations*.

describes the soul as ‘suddenly staggering as if drunk, as it is [...] drawn into the body’.¹⁸ The image of a drunken staggering soul could well have been on John’s mind when he described the consequences that face those who succumb to courtly temptation. The courtier forgets his own interests as he chases after tantalizing diversions. He betrays himself and this self-betrayal leads to self-degradation as ‘the creature of reason becomes a brute’ and man, who was made in the image of the Creator, ‘is transformed into a beast by a sort of similarity in character’. This is why hunting, for John, becomes the emblematic disease of courtly life. The deluded courtier, like the deluded soul, forgetful of who he is, runs off after petty pleasures and small game, glorying in the courage of his dogs when they bring down some tiny rabbit, taking pride in his skills as a butcher and his mastery of hunting jargon as if ‘this knowledge constitutes liberal studies of the higher class’.¹⁹ Trapping his game, the courtier finds himself trapped.

Throughout the *Policraticus*, John describes the court as a place of deception in which illusion stands in for truth. It is illusion, however, of a very particular sort. John has no interest in the sorts of visual errors that play such a prominent role in most philosophical debate. He never mentions such tried and true examples of visual deception as the straight stick that appears broken when partially submerged in water or the large tower that appears small when seen from a distance. For John, flatterers stand at the centre of courtly deception and illusion. Whereas Plato stressed the dangers of sensation and warned his followers against those insidious pleasures and pains ‘that rivet the soul to the body and [...] weld them together’,²⁰ John stresses the dangers of language, of false words and feigned gestures. ‘One who is called flatterer in the strict sense of the word’, John explains, ‘is he who whitewashes another’s fault, and, that the latter may not see himself, spreads before the eyes of his victim a cloud, as it were, of vanity and fills his ears with encomiums’.²¹

Just as Plato’s Academy slid into scepticism, so too does John. Early on in the *Policraticus*, he proclaims his allegiance to the Academic school of philosophers, adding that he is ‘faithful to their rule in all matters that appear doubtful to

¹⁸ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. by Stahl, p. 135.

¹⁹ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk I, ch. 4 (pp. 15–16).

²⁰ Plato, *Phaedo*, ed. by Hamilton and Cairns, 83d.

²¹ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk III, ch. 4 (p. 161 (181)): ‘Verum qui suo nomine, ut proprie loquamur, dicitur adulator, uitia cuiusque dealbat, et, ne se ipsum uideat, oculos colloquentis quadam nube uanitatis implet, et aures falsis praeconiorum titulis reficit’.

the sage'.²² In the *Metalogicon*, he clarifies this allegiance when he distinguishes between three strands of Academic scepticism. There are those Academics who deny we possess any knowledge and there are those who claim we only know those things that are 'self-evident and necessary'. John rejects these first two types of scepticism. He aligns himself with a third type which 'consists in those of us who do not precipitate an opinion concerning those questions that are doubtful to a wise man'.²³ In the *Entheticus*, his poetic satire of philosophy and the court, John associates this third type of scepticism with Socrates' pupil Antisthenese, who distinguished between self-evident things and things known through experience. While we can know the former, our knowledge of the latter is not so secure. What we know through experience, what usually happens, John cautions, need not always happen. About these sorts of things, things that are credible, if not certain, Antisthenese advises moderation in our judgement and speech. We should restrain and qualify our words, adding phrases like 'I believe' or 'I think'.²⁴ In the *Policraticus*, John refers this sort of knowledge in terms of probability. 'In philosophy', he writes, 'accepting as I do the Academic system, I have admitted that which seems to the best of my judgement likely or probable'.²⁵

Probability, John explains in the *Metalogicon*, is one of the three branches of logic, 'the science of argumentative reasoning'.²⁶ Unlike demonstrative logic, which focuses on principles and 'rejoices in necessity', and sophistry, whose 'only objective is to lose its adversary in a fog of delusions', probable logic concerns itself with 'propositions which, to all or to many men, or at least to the wise,

²² John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk I, prologue (p. 10 (25)): 'Nec Academicorum erubesco professionem, qui in his quae sunt dubitabilia sapienti ab eorum uestigiis non recedo'. On John's scepticism, see Nederman, 'Beyond Stoicism and Aristotelianism', and Grellard, *Jean de Salisbury* (forthcoming). Compare with the rather dismissive remarks of Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus*, pp. 36–38.

²³ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, Bk IV, ch. 31 (p. 251). John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, ed. by Hall, Bk IV, ch. 31 (p. 168): 'Academicus uero fluctuat, et quid in singulis uerum sit definire non audet. Haec tamen secta trifariam diuisa est. Habet enim qui se nihil omnino scire profiteantur, et cautela nimia demeruerint philosophi nomen. Habet alios qui se sola necessaria, et per se nota quae scilicet nesciri non possunt, confiteantur nosse. Tertius gradus nostrorum est, qui sententiam non praecipitant in his quae sunt dubitabilia sapienti'. Unless otherwise noted, I rely on McGarry's translation. When including the Latin original, page numbers to Hall's edition will appear in parentheses.

²⁴ John of Salisbury, *Entheticus Maior and Minor*, ed. by Van Laarhoven, I, p. 180.

²⁵ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk I, prologue (p. 10 (25)): 'et in philosophicis Academicis disputans pro rationis modulo quae occurrebant probabilia sectatus sim'.

²⁶ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, Bk II, ch. 3 (p. 78).

seem to be valid'.²⁷ Just as John Rainolds would argue some four hundred years later, John asserts that there is little doubt that probable logic is the most useful of the three branches. While demonstration is the branch of logic appropriate for resolving mathematical questions, it 'is generally feeble and ineffective' in all those many areas of human inquiry where necessity is simply not possible. Most questions concerning natural, moral, and rational philosophy require probable logic. Probable logic itself consists of two parts, dialectic and rhetoric. The difference between dialectic and rhetoric is one of focus and purpose.²⁸ Dialectic investigates and seeks answers to questions of a general nature. John offers an example drawn from the field of moral philosophy, 'Is it better to obey one's parents or the laws when they disagree?'. Unlike logical demonstrations which begin with necessary first principles, dialectical proof begins with propositions or 'theses' that 'are well known to all, or to the leaders in each field'.²⁹ A dialectical proposition is probable if it 'holds true in several cases', if it can counter most, even if not all, objections. By contrast, rhetoric analyses particular cases. The orator will construct a persuasive speech based upon hypotheses that derive from the circumstances. 'Such circumstances', John adds, citing Boethius's *Topics*, 'are: "Who, what, where, by what means, why, how, and when"'.³⁰

We need the methods of dialectical and rhetorical analysis, John argues, because our knowledge of the world is imperfect and often wrong. In the *Metalogicon*, John lists eight impediments that limit and obscure our attempts to know the world. There is our invincible ignorance concerning matters of faith,

²⁷ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, Bk II, ch. 3 (p. 79 (60)): 'Probabilis autem uersatur in his quae uidentur omnibus, aut pluribus, aut sapientibus, et his uel omnibus uel pluribus uel maxime notis et probabilibus aut consecutiuus eorum'.

²⁸ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, Bk II, ch. 12 (p. 102).

²⁹ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, Bk II, ch. 13 (p. 105 (76)): "Demonstratiuae ergo principia necessaria sunt, dialecticae probabilia". Vnde et dialecticus ab illis abstinerebit quae nulli uidentur, ne habeatur insanus, et a manifestis, ne palpare uideatur in tenebris, et his dumtaxat insistet quae aut omnibus, aut pluribus, aut praecipuis, in uno quoque generum nota erunt'.

³⁰ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, Bk II, ch. 12 (pp. 101–02 (74)): 'Siquidem quaestionem habet materiam, sed eam quae hypothesis dicitur, id est quae circumstantiis implicatur, relinquit oratori. Sunt autem circumstantiae quas Boetius in quarto topicorum enumerat, quis, quid, ubi, quibus adminiculis, cur, quomodo, quando'. Boethius, *De topicis differentiis*, Bk iv, 1205C, defines the circumstances: 'The dialectical discipline examines the thesis only; a thesis is a question not involved in circumstances. The rhetorical discipline, on the other hand, investigates and discusses hypotheses, that is, questions hedged in by a multitude of circumstances. Circumstances are who, what, where, when, why, how and by what means'.

the frailty of the human condition, the brevity of human life, our trivial concern with useless matters, the conflicts among probable opinions, and the sheer enormity and expanse of all there is to be known. Significant though these reasons are, John locates the chief impediment in sin 'which separates us from God, and bars us from the fountain of truth, for which nevertheless, our reason does not cease to thirst'.³¹

John's emphasis on the connection between sin and human ignorance places his entire discussion of scepticism in a decidedly theological framework. By the same token, it also allows John to conceive of the cause of sin almost entirely in epistemological terms. We sin when we pursue idle and useless knowledge and claim to know with certainty things beyond our understanding. Curiosity is a sin, John warns, and those pagan philosophers who occupied themselves investigating the 'hidden causes' became vain through their own fault. John repeats these warnings in the *Policraticus*, again citing the example of the pagan philosophers who 'reared on high the structure [...] of their own genius in a war against heaven' only to find themselves unknowingly barred from truth. Curiosity is really more symptom than cause of our broken condition. Pagan philosophers pursued their investigations beyond proper bounds because they had forgotten who and what they were. Having become mysteries to themselves, they thought they were wise when, in fact, they were fools.³² 'When the mind is over-occupied with numerous questions that do not greatly concern it', he writes, 'it wanders far afield from itself, and often even becomes oblivious of itself and no error can be more pernicious than this'.³³

And so it is that John's scepticism returns him to the court with its flatterers and dazzled amnesiac courtiers running off with their hunting dogs on a cold dark morning. 'Return' may even be the wrong term. John's discussion of scepticism

³¹ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, Bk IV, ch. 40 (pp. 268–69 (180)): 'Sed in his octo quae proposita sunt, nihil adeo pro mea opinione scientiam eorum quae expediunt impedit, sicut culpa quae separat inter nos et Deum, et fontem praecludit ueritatis, quem tamen ratio sitire non cessat'.

³² John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk VII, ch. 1 (pp. 217–18).

³³ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, Bk IV, ch. 40 (pp. 269–70): 'Dum autem mens circa multa et non multum ad se pertinentia amplius occupatur, euagatur longius a se, et plerumque obliuiscitur sui. Quo quidem nullus error perniciosior est'. Speaking of Pierre Charron specifically and Renaissance humanists more generally, Rice, *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom*, pp. 183–84, writes, 'Sharpening a common humanist tendency to skepticism in knowledge and Pelagianism in the moral life, [Charron] says that the intellect is weak and fickle, incapable of knowing any ultimate truth, while the will is potent, efficacious and entirely in man's control'. He could have been describing John of Salisbury.

ticism, demonstration, and dialectic never left the court. While John's stated purpose in the *Metalogicon* is to defend the traditional educational program of the cathedral schools from a new breed of critic, he is quick to remind his readers that these critics are none other than his peers. 'Utterly at a loss to evade the snapping teeth of my fellow members of the court,' John contends that he had no choice but to take up the pen if he hoped to answer all their charges.³⁴ But John is defending more than a pedagogy and style of learning, he is defending his position at court as someone, who, among other things, is a representative and supporter of that style of education. In the hothouse of the court, pedagogical attacks become personal attacks and the personal is always already political. 'Being respectful of all and injuring no one,' John laments, 'used, of yore, to assure one of popularity'. Clearly the old ways have been forgotten and with his status at court in question, John has no choice but to craft his arguments specifically to strike down what he describes as Cornificius's daily carping. Not only do courtly disputes compel him to compose the *Metalogicon*, John is equally clear that his philosophical work must be immediately relevant to life in the court. 'Any pretext of philosophy,' he explains, 'that does not bear fruit in the cultivation of virtue and the guidance of one's conduct is futile and false'.³⁵

It is prudence, John contends, that bridges the divide between theory and practice and transforms philosophy from a useless to a useful pursuit. Prudence takes up the tools of 'argumentative reasoning' and uses them to discern the truth, and, failing that, to determine what is useful and probable when certainty is not possible. As a result, John connects prudence with wisdom, 'whose fruit consists in the love of what is good and the practice of virtue'.³⁶ Successfully distinguishing true goods from transitory pleasures has real consequences. The person who mistakes the transitory for the true, the apparent for the real, will find himself oppressed under the 'yoke of vice'. Enslaved to morbid desires like Cornificius, he will forget the teachings of philosophy in his mad pursuit of money, deeming 'nothing sordid and inane, save the straits of poverty'. He will become a flatterer. But having said this much, John cuts short his account of

³⁴ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, prologue (p. 3).

³⁵ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, prologue (p. 6 (11)): 'Est enim quaelibet professio philosophandi inutilis et falsa, quae se ipsam in cultu uirtutis et uitae exhibitione non aperit'.

³⁶ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, Bk II, ch. 1 (pp. 74–75 (56–57)): 'Cum enim omnium expetibilium prima sit sapientia, ipsiusque fructus in amore boni et uirtutum cultu consistat, mentem necesse est in illius inuestigatione uersari, et res plena inquisitione discutere, ut ei de singulis esse possit purum incorruptumque iudicium'.

flatterers in the *Metalogicon*. 'I will not discuss their ways here,' he explains, 'for my *Policraticus* delves into the latter at length, although it cannot hope to ferret out all their tricks, which would be beyond the powers of any mere human.'³⁷

Rhetoric, Ethics, Deception

The move from the *Metalogicon* to the opening books of the *Policraticus* involves a shift in topics, from a defence of philosophy to a critique of the court, but it is something else as well. It also marks a shift in the deployment of prudence. In the *Metalogicon*, John defends the importance of dialectic with the tools of dialectical reasoning. He constructs arguments using probable theses, that is, theses approved and accepted by the wise. In the *Policraticus*, he does something different. He constantly enacts the move from dialectic to rhetoric, from thesis to hypothesis, from general question to specific question. John signals this difference in the *Metalogicon* with his brief allusion to the *Policraticus*. No one can spell out, account for, or predict all the deceptions, plots, and schemes of the courtiers. Their vanity and avarice know no limits and the wise man, the man of eminence struggling against the illusory attractions of the court, must always be ready to adapt to each new challenge. Dialectics, with its reliance on generally approved principles, has its uses, but in the daily life of the court, the questions that confront us are always already 'hedged in by a multitude of circumstances' (as Boethius puts it). Rhetorical practice provides the tools the man of eminence needs to determine the best course of action, not in the abstract, not in most cases, but in this case, at this moment, against these opponents.

John is heavily indebted to Cicero for this conception of rhetoric. In *On Duties*, Cicero depicts the wise and honourable man as the perfect orator. Just as the orator must always match his words and gestures to the demands of the moment if he hopes to sway his audience's opinion, so must the honourable man always match his words and actions to the demands of the moment if he hopes to do the right thing. We do the right thing, Cicero argues, when we honourably and appropriately fulfil our duties. This requires a particular sort of knowledge. We cannot know what duty demands of us, what we should do or

³⁷ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, Bk I, ch. 4 (pp. 19–20 (19)): 'Taceo uias istorum quoniam eas policraticus noster diligenter exequitur, et si omnes plene non sufficiat indagare. Hoc enim uires excedit humanas'. Limiting his discussion to the *Metalogicon*, Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism*, pp. 183–89, overlooks John's rhetorical turn in the *Policraticus*.

say in any given situation, unless we know who we are, and who we are, Cicero believes, requires an awareness of the two different roles with which Nature has 'dressed' us. The first role, Cicero writes, 'is common, arising from the fact that we all have a share in reason and in the superiority by which we surpass brutes.' In everything we do, we must act like rational beings, tied with bonds of love and fellowship to our family and fellow citizens. The second role 'is that assigned specifically to individuals.' Each of us has different strengths and weaknesses, peculiarities of character. We must consider these roles, what demands they place on us, what duties they require from us, so that we can meld our actions together in the most virtuous, seemly, and decorous manner possible.³⁸ We must, as Cicero puts it, become 'good calculators of our duties'³⁹ so that 'all action should be free from rashness and carelessness; nor should anyone do anything for which he cannot give a persuasive justification: that is practically the definition of duty.'⁴⁰

Quite early on in the *Policraticus*, John adopts a version of Cicero's distinction between common and specific duties. 'The principles of nature are binding upon all alike', John informs us, 'considerations of duty, upon particular individuals.'⁴¹ Appropriate action, for John as it was for Cicero, depends upon self-knowledge. The man of eminence must understand his boundaries, limits, and frailties. He must know 'what is within him, what without, what below, what above, what opposite, what before, and what after.'⁴² Tellingly, John also suggests that he must understand the broader contexts in which he seeks this knowledge. Immediately before embarking on his critique of flatterers, John distinguishes between two kinds of self-knowledge, the knowledge we acquire through faith and the knowledge we acquire through learning. While faith trumps learning in the long run, learning cannot be ignored. 'Let the rule of

³⁸ Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. by Griffin and Adams, Bk I, ch. 107 (p. 42). Jonsen and Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry*, pp. 75–88, offer a concise summary of what these calculations would look like. On prudence and decorum in Cicero, Cape, Jr., 'Cicero and the Development of Prudential Practice.' Nederman, 'Nature, Sin and the Origins of Society' surveys Cicero's influence from the twelfth through to the fourteenth centuries.

³⁹ Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. by Griffin and Adams, Bk I, ch. 59 (p. 24).

⁴⁰ Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. by Griffin and Adams, Bk I, ch. 101 (p. 40).

⁴¹ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk I, ch. 2 (p. 12 (28)): 'Quae uero naturae sunt, peraeque sunt omnium, quae officii, sua sunt singulorum.'

⁴² John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk III, ch. 2 (p. 155 (175)): 'Est ergo primum hominis sapientiam affectantis quid ipse sit, quid intra se quid extra, quid infra quid supra, quid contra quid ante uel postea sit contemplari.'

faith be deferred', John writes, 'as it will be discussed in its own time and place. Learning then involves knowledge of self, which cannot be attained if it fails to measure its own strength or if it is ignorant of the strength of others.'⁴³

Context and circumstance become all-determining for John, as they would later for John Rainolds and so many other Early Modern humanists, rendering time-honoured maxims doubtful and ideals of Aristotelian demonstration forever beyond our reach. 'Those things are of doubtful validity', John writes, 'which are supported by authority of neither faith, sense or apparent reasons and which in their main points lean towards either side'. While at first this might sound as if it holds open the possibility for quite a bit of certainty about things, John's subsequent list of doubtful subjects rather quickly quashes any such hope. We can have no certainty, he tells us, concerning providence, 'the substance, quantity, power, efficacy and the origin of the soul', nor about fate and free will. Nor do we possess any certainty about an increasingly vast array of moral and ethical matters such as 'the use, beginning and end of all virtues and vice, whether everyone who possesses one virtue possesses all, or whether all sins are equal and to be punished equally'. Human ingenuity is also at a loss when it comes to determining the status of 'duties and the various kinds of situations which arise in reference to agreements and quasi agreements; to misdemeanours and quasi misdemeanours or to other matters.'⁴⁴ Lacking universally

⁴³ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk III, ch. 1 (p. 155 (175)): 'Sed fidei regula paulisper differatur, quoniam eam tempus et locus suus expectat. Ceterum scientia sui notitiam habet. Quod euenire non potest si non metiatur uires suas, si ignorat alienas.'

⁴⁴ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk VII, ch. 2 (pp. 221–22). For the original Latin for this passage and all others after book four, see John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, ed. by Webb: 'Sunt autem dubitabilia sapienti quae nec fidei nec sensus aut rationis manifestae persuadet auctoritas et quae suis in utramque partem nituntur firmamentis. Talia quidem sunt quae quaeruntur de prouidentia, de substantia quantitate uiribus efficacia et origine animae, de fato et facilitate naturae, casu et libero arbitrio, de materia et motu et principiis corporum, de progressu multitudinis et magnitudinis sectione an terminos omnino non habeant an eos dumtaxat alogos tandem inueniant, de tempore et loco, de numero et oratione, de eodem et diuerso, in quo plurima attritio est, de diuiduo et indiuiduo, de substantia et forma uocis, de statu uniuersalium, de usu et fine ortu que uirtutum et uitiorum, an omnes uirtutes habeat qui unam habet, an omnia sint peccata aequalia et aequaliter punienda; item de causis rerum et adiunctione earum uel repugnantia, de effluxione et defluxione Oceani, de ortu Nili, de humorum in animalibus corporibus augmento et diminutione ad motum lunae, de uariis latentis naturae secretis, de officiis et uariis figuris causarum quae in contractibus aut quasi contractibus, maleficiis aut quasi maleficiis, aut aliis rerum formis uarie oriuntur, de natura et operibus eius, de ueritate et primis rerum initiis in quibus humanum ingenium deficit, an angeli omnino sua non habeant aut qualia habeant corpora, et quae pie quaeruntur de ipso Deo qui totius naturae rationalis excedit inuestigationem et super omnia, quae mente possunt concipi, exaltatur' (p. 98).

binding first and certain principles to serve as regulative ideals in guiding our behaviour, we are forced to make do with merely probable theses whose applicability to any given situation is always open to modification depending on the ever-changing situation at hand. We are left, in other words, with rhetoric.

The significance of John's adoption of a rhetorical approach to the world and ethics in the *Policraticus*'s opening books appears in a variety of guises. More often than not, it shows up when John suggests that generally accepted ethical principles be modified or ignored in certain situations. John, for example, goes on at length about the indignity of hunting, invoking such authorities as Horace, Valerius Maximus, scripture, and the Church Fathers. Hunting, he informs us, debases noble natures, rendering them worse than peasants and barely on par with the animals themselves. Towards the end of this diatribe which, for all intents and purposes, forms something like a dialectical argument from probable principles against hunting, John adopts a rhetorical mode of analysis. Is hunting necessarily bad? Not at all. While it is all too often abused, considered on its own it is a morally indifferent activity. 'Therefore', John concludes, 'it is quite possible, depending upon the circumstances, time, manner, individual, and purpose, for hunting to be a useful and honourable occupation'.⁴⁵ John performs precisely the same move from dialectical to rhetorical analysis when he considers gambling, an activity to be abhorred 'in which one becomes more depraved in proportion as his skill in it increases'.⁴⁶ This probable moral thesis notwithstanding, John then argues that there is nothing wrong with gambling given the proper circumstances. John writes, 'The circumstances that regulate all freedom from restraint are dependent upon a preceding consideration of place, time, individual, and cause. It is this consideration which makes all transactions appear beautiful or condemns them as morally ugly'.⁴⁷

While few would object to the occasional hunt or roll of the dice, John applies his rhetorical ethics to other more morally dubious endeavours. Having raged against the flatterers throughout most all of the *Policraticus*'s third book,

⁴⁵ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk I, ch. 4 (p. 23). Nederman, 'Beyond Stoicism and Aristotelianism', p. 187, makes this observation in somewhat different terms when he links John's scepticism to his 'praise of liberty of thought and speech'.

⁴⁶ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk I, ch. 5 (p. 27).

⁴⁷ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk I, ch. 5 (p. 28 (44–45)): 'Totius uero licentiae moderatrix est loci, temporis, modi, personae et causae praemissa inspectio, quae omnium negotiorum faciem decora uenustate commendat aut turpitudinis condemnat obprobrio'. Compare this with Michael Wilks's very interesting essay, Wilks, 'John of Salisbury and the Tyranny of Nonsense', where he suggests the principle of the middle way guides John's ethics, while making no reference to John's sceptical and rhetorical leanings.

John asks, in the final chapter, if there is anyone the man of eminence is allowed to flatter. John answers, famously, 'Yes'. 'It is lawful to flatter him whom it is lawful to slay', he writes, 'and it is not merely lawful to slay a tyrant but even just and right'.⁴⁸ And so, there are special circumstances in which flattery itself becomes morally appropriate. While the flattery and assassination of tyrants is the most extreme case John considers, the power of circumstances to free us from normal moral restraints against flattery shows up in numerous places throughout the early sections of the *Policraticus*. Midway through his discussion of flatterers, John abruptly and without warning offers some surprisingly underhanded tips. 'The art of flattery', he writes, 'is very effective when you appear to be negligent of your own interests and attend to those of others; speaking of your own profit never or rarely, but always, or at least often, of his whose favour you are currying'.⁴⁹

John is in no way suggesting anything like a moral free-for-all in which the man of eminence can justify any action whatsoever through recourse to difficult circumstance. Each of us has our duties, our role to fulfil, the moral 'garb' that fits us best and those duties, to ourselves, our fellows, our state, and to God, must determine how best we can fulfil our duties at any given moment.⁵⁰ In normal circumstances, perhaps these decisions would be easy and recourse to standard and generally accepted moral principles could successfully guide us. Unfortunately, the court, this entire fallen world, is no normal place. Self-serving duplicitous courtiers surround and attempt to deceive us and with people like these, John contends, we can have neither 'affection nor friendship'.⁵¹ John often describes the world as a comedy or tragedy, a stage play in which people have taken on false roles. Just as often, he invokes metaphors of combat and warfare.⁵² If negotiating one's way through the world of the court is akin to combat, then

⁴⁸ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk III, ch. 15 (p. 211).

⁴⁹ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, BK III, ch. 11 (p. 186 (205)): 'In eo autem adulatoriae uis magna consistit si omissis propriis aliena commoda curare uidearis, de tuo numquam aut raro, semper aut saepe loquens de illius quem aucuparis emolumento'. He makes similar comments at Bk III, ch. 12 (pp. 190–91).

⁵⁰ Both Garver, *Machiavelli*, pp. 3–25, and Harriman, 'Theory Without Modernity', pp. 14–20, stress that prudence must never be reduced to a mere reactive, ends-justify-the-means, form of reasoning.

⁵¹ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk III, ch. 12 (p. 192).

⁵² John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk III, ch. 8 (p. 172).

the rules of combat apply and John wholly approves the use of *strategemata*, cunningly wrought military deceptions, in overcoming our enemies.⁵³

For John, the uncertainties the man of eminence faces can justify deceptive ruses and tricks. Lies beget lies and in the *Policraticus*'s prologue, John simply notes the wisdom of the psalmist's observations that 'every man is a liar'.⁵⁴ Dishonesty may well be a symptom of language itself, at least this is the lesson he seems to draw from the Fall. 'The nature of man', John observes, 'is prone to evil whose infancy of innocence, so to speak, continued as long as he abstained from communication perverted and perverting'.⁵⁵ But who can abstain from that? Occasionally, John will deplore lies and mendacity. More often than not, however, John ignores Augustine's well-known prohibitions and theses against lying, never mentioning them once, while admitting that he himself has had recourse to lies when it has suited his purposes.⁵⁶ In the *Entheticus*, John argues that 'that deception is good which secures benefits, and by which joys, life and salvation are procured'. The man of eminence must be all things to all people, feigning many things, to draw the sinful from their sins. Often, there is simply no other way. 'The work of infiltration', John notes, having again invoked the language of combat, 'recalls from vices those whom reason cannot recall'.⁵⁷

⁵³ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk VIII, ch. 14 (pp. 389–90). John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, ed. by Webb, vol. II, Bk VIII. ch. 14 (p. 334): 'Occurrent multa huiusmodi quae laudis uerae poterunt praestare materiam, si quis antiquorum uafre dicta uel facta strategemmata et strategemmatica quoque recenseat. Ceterum (quia saepe strategemmatum mentio facta est et res nominis non usquequaque cunctis innotuit) Valerius Maximus strategemmata sic diffinit ut dicat quia eius pars calliditatis egregia et ab omni reprehensione procul remota, cuius opera, quia appellatione uix apte exprimi possunt, Graeca pronuntiatione strategemmata appellantur. Proprie tamen strategemmata sunt quae ad rem pertinent militarem; nam et ab eo dicuntur stratilates. Quae uero contra propriae appellationis notam ad res alias pertinent (Iulio Frontino teste) strategemmatica appellantur; distat enim strategemmaticum a strategemmate quomodo genus a specie differt'.

⁵⁴ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk I, introduction (p. 9). See below, n. 55, for quote.

⁵⁵ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk VIII, ch. 24 (p. 402).

⁵⁶ John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, trans. by Pike, Bk I, introduction (pp. 9–10 (25)): 'Cedo tamen ne uidear contentione gaudere, et me officiosis fateor usum esse mendacii, et, si aliter aemulus non quiescit (quoniam et ego meum Cornificium habeo et Lanuinum) me mendacii reum esse consentio, qui scriptum noui quia omnis homo mendax'.

⁵⁷ John of Salisbury, *Entheticus Maior and Minor*, ed. by Van Laarhoven, pp. 199–200. On Augustine's prohibition against lying, see Feehan, 'Augustine on Lying and Deception' and Feehan, 'The Morality of Lying in St. Augustine'. On John and the permissibility of lying, see Denery II, 'Christine de Pizan Against the Theologians'; Colish, 'Rethinking Lying in the

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With his advocacy of the well-timed lie, John completes the intellectual journey from uncertainty to probability to deception that so many Early Modern thinkers would later make. As it would for those later writers, John's journey more or less compels him to conceptualize the individual as somehow apart from the society in which he finds himself. The man of eminence, constantly on guard against the plots and schemes of others, cannot help but be aware of the menacing and unknown interior depths of his fellow courtiers. By the same token, how can he not be aware of his own secrets, the difference between his unspoken intentions and his outward appearance, as he assumes misleading and false gestures to mask his goals from those around him?⁵⁸ John explicitly signals this distinction between surface and depth, appearance and reality, in the Platonic analogy with which he begins and frames the *Policraticus*. Just as the soul must be separated from the body, so must the man of eminence keep his distance from the court and its temptations.

John is hardly the only medieval writer to recognize the potential disjuncture between our interior and exterior selves. Confessional manuals beginning in the twelfth century obsessively reflect on the challenges of ascertaining the truth and sincerity of a penitent's confession. The importance of confession and its connections to the rhetorical tradition must not be underestimated. As early as the first decade of the thirteenth century, Thomas of Chobham had incorporated the rhetorical circumstances into the practice of hearing confessions and it shouldn't surprise anyone that when, in *The Courtier*, Federico recommends that the wise courtier employ the circumstances to guide his every action, Morello da Ortona points out their connection to confessional practice.⁵⁹ Nor was John the only observer of court life to notice this possible disjuncture between surface and depth. Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* offers one of the

'Twelfth Century'; and, especially, Nederman and Dow, 'The Road to Heaven is Paved with Pious Deception', who were the first really to highlight this aspect of John's thought.

⁵⁸ Cavaillé, 'De la dissimulation honnête' discusses the biblical and Christian 'inflexion subjective de la prudence'.

⁵⁹ Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. by Bull, p. 115. The standard work on confessional practice is Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*. On Thomas Chobham and the use of the rhetorical circumstances in confession, see Denery II, *Seeing and Being Seen*, pp. 57–63.

most perfectly idealized models of the self-aware and prudentially calculating courtier in European literature.⁶⁰

These affinities between medieval and Early Modern ethical practices and conceptions of the self are too often overlooked because historians too often examine definitions of prudence independently of the setting within which different medieval writers understood the practical intellect to make its actual evaluations and judgements. 'Taking care to avoid deception from any and every quarter', John writes in the *Metalogicon*, 'prudence looks to the future, and forms providence; recalls what has happened in the past, accumulates a treasury of memories; shrewdly appraises what is present, and begets astuteness or discernment; or takes full cognizance of everything [whether past, present or future], and constitutes circumspection'.⁶¹ Abstracted from his philosophical scepticism and his critique of court life, John's description of prudence may well sound rather unremarkable. A century later, for example, Thomas Aquinas would define prudence as 'a virtue most necessary for human life. For a good life consists in good deeds. Now in order to do good deeds it matters not only what a man does, but also how he does it; to wit, that he do it from right choice and not merely from impulse or passion'.⁶² Certainly John would not have disagreed with this definition. John's emphasis on the need for the man of eminence to control his passions and not lose himself to the seductive temptations of the court, accords nicely with Thomas's stipulation for some sort of rational control and over our actions and emotions. Attention to mere definitions, however, can be misleading.

When Thomas turns to the sins of craftiness and guile, two of the vices opposed to prudence, he stresses that prudence is a virtue of means and ends. Prudence requires that we seek the proper end in the proper manner. A man commits the sin of craftiness, Thomas explains, 'when in pursuit of some end, whether right or wrong, a man takes ways that are not genuine, but feigned and specious: this is the sin of cunning'.⁶³ Deceptions of this sort, Thomas adds, can

⁶⁰ Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*, trans. by Hatto. On Tristan and the courtly ideal, see Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness*, pp. 101–10.

⁶¹ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, trans. by McGarry, Bk IV, ch. 12 (pp. 221–22 (150)): 'Ne ergo undecumque fallatur, ad futura prospectum intendit, et prouidentiam format, uel praeterita ad mentem reuocans thesaurizat memoriae, uel de praesentibus callet, et astutiae uel calliditatis speciem parit, aut se pariter ad uniuersa diffundit, et ei circumspectio nascitur'.

⁶² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, ed. by Hughes and others, XXIII, I–II, q. 57, art. 5 (p. 55).

⁶³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, ed. by Hughes and others, XXXVI, II–II, q. 55, art. 3 (p. 153).

involve things said or things done and in either case they are nothing but wicked guile.⁶⁴ Definitional similarities aside, John's conception of prudent action clearly departs here from Thomas's conception. John proclaims prudence to be the root of all virtues and, as circumstance demands, sometimes the virtuous thing to do will be to hunt or gamble, to lie, deceive or dissimulate, to flatter, perhaps to kill. The difference between John and Thomas at this point is not trivial. It is not merely an instance of two people reaching different probable conclusions concerning a complicated moral choice. Rather, it depends upon an entirely different set of assumptions about our cognitive relation to the world in which prudence has to operate. It is the difference between Aristotle and Cicero, between demonstration and rhetoric, and it is a difference that puts John at odds with the scholastic theology that was taking root in the twelfth century and would come to dominate intellectual life for the next several centuries. Thomas treats the prohibition against lies and deception as an exceptionless moral norm, rooted in our relation to God, ourselves, and our fellows, whereas John's scepticism renders most every norm open to just violation.⁶⁵

All of this matters in our evaluation of medieval and Early Modern responses to uncertainty because it shapes what will appear as novel or modern, dated or outmoded, in those responses. Certainly when compared to scholastic conceptions of prudence and ethical behaviour, certain Early Modern writings represent something of a clear break, but this is difference achieved through false comparison. To begin with, there is no shortage of Early Modern writers in the aftermath of Castiglione, Machiavelli, and Charron, Catholic and Protestant alike, who continue to offer up Augustinian prohibitions against lies.⁶⁶ Similarly, there are medieval writers who reject Augustine's prohibitions against lying and Aristotle's definitions of scientific knowledge. The example of John of Salisbury reveals the problems with overemphasizing the contrast between medieval scholasticism and Early Modern humanism. Scholasticism does not speak for or represent every facet of medieval culture and society. John defends and represents a medieval humanist tradition, a tradition rooted in dialectic and rhetoric. Even if he was fighting a losing battle against the ascendant forces of scholastic Aristotelianism, it seems altogether too much to assume

⁶⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, ed. by Hughes and others, xxxvi, II-II, q. 55, art. 4, reply 2 (pp. 155–57).

⁶⁵ On Thomas and exceptionless norms, see Finnis, *Aquinas*, pp. 154–70.

⁶⁶ Sommerville, "The 'New Art of Lying'", runs through the variety of opposing attitudes among Protestant and Catholic writers during this period.

that the humanist tradition simply vanished from the courts where it had flourished and found its natural home. University writings may give truth to the lie that this tradition disappeared, but romances, fabliaux, and court manuals, like Christine de Pizan's *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, tell a different story.⁶⁷

None of this is to deny that there are real differences between John of Salisbury and fifteenth- and sixteenth-century writers, but what they have in common needs to be recognized if we are ever to become clear about what, if anything, is so modern about Early Modern Europe. Their shared experience of and response to uncertainty, a response that moves from scepticism to probability to deception, reveals a dependence on an intellectual tradition rooted in rhetorical ideas and a belief that we can only come to know ourselves and the world around us through fits and starts, within contexts and circumstances. What distinguishes Early Modern writers from John of Salisbury is the particular theses and hypotheses they believe to be more or less probable, the range of actions that are deemed appropriate, decorous, fitting, beneficial. These may well merely be differences in style, not substance. In any event, the differences between them seem less significant, less dramatic, than what they have in common and these commonalities may reveal real continuities. If this is the case, then the real outlier is Scholasticism itself, a sudden and overwhelming intellectual phenomenon, at odds with a long-standing rhetorical tradition that continued to endure, even if, for while, overshadowed by its new rival.

What is so modern about Early Modern Europe may simply be what endured.

⁶⁷ On Christine de Pizan's conceptions of prudence and deception, see Denery II, 'Christine de Pizan Against the Theologians', and Nederman and Dow, 'The Road to Heaven is Paved with Pious Deception'. On the medieval Christian humanist tradition, see Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, and especially his concluding comments, pp. 325–29. While not specifically concerned with deception, Gillingham, 'From Civilitas to Civility: Codes of Manners' charts the importance and influence of medieval court conduct manuals.

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NEW STANDARDS FOR CERTAINTY: EARLY RECEPTIONS OF ARISTOTLE'S *POSTERIOR ANALYTICS*

Eileen C. Sweeney

It is a kind of truism that the search for certainty, achieved by grounding knowledge in certain, indubitable foundations is a modern, not a medieval project. So, too, methodological or systemic doubt, which is the corollary of the drive towards certainty, is taken to be a modern, not a medieval moment. Like most truisms, this one has something to it, but my claim is that the shape of this dialectic of certainty and uncertainty has a predecessor in the medieval reception of Aristotle's notion of science from the *Posterior Analytics*. The *Posterior Analytics*, unavailable in the Latin West until later in the twelfth century and not well known or understood until early in the thirteenth, introduces an ideal of science and scientific certainty that even the earliest adopters realized pushed large portions of accepted truth into the realm of uncertainty.¹ What is thereby created is a two-tiered system of knowledge, those meeting and those failing to meet (or eschewing) the scientific standard of certainty. Some Aristotle scholars have argued that Aristotle's account of the rigours of

¹ The translation used by Robert Grosseteste was made by James of Venice sometime after 1159. Grosseteste makes references to other translations and seems also to have consulted the translation from the Arabic made by Gerard of Cremona, who also translated Themistius's paraphrase of the text. On the dating of Grosseteste's commentary to the later 1220s, see McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 512–14 and Crombie, *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science*, pp. 46–47.

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scientific knowledge was aimed largely at countering claims of the sophists by establishing criteria whereby knowledge could be distinguished from its mere appearance.² Transposed to medieval Europe, the standard for knowledge given in the *Posterior Analytics* comes to be seen as something else, as articulating a standard for scientific *as opposed to* other, lesser forms of knowledge but not the non-knowledge of sophistry.

This essay takes up two types of response to Aristotle's notion of science. For some thinkers, Aristotle's requirements for science — necessary and certain premises drawn from indubitable first principles combined to reach conclusions that are themselves necessary and certain — become the standard for evaluating existing disciplines in order to see whether they will be weighed in this balance and found wanting. For others, however, other forms of study (especially sacred study), which do not have the characteristics of Aristotelian science, have their own standards of rigour and their own 'inner' or 'affective' certainty.

Robert Grosseteste and Roger Bacon: Applying Aristotle's Standard for Certainty

Robert Grosseteste (b. 1168?–d. 1253) began studying natural science and Aristotle's work in natural science in about 1220, after the ban on Aristotle was lifted in 1210. His *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, written in about 1228, seems to be the first in the Latin West to follow the text carefully, attempting to understand the complex theory of demonstration and its presuppositions. Grosseteste makes great strides in understanding this work, famously described by John of Salisbury as impenetrably difficult, but he does so by adapting it to his own peculiar brand of Neo-Platonism.³

² Byrne, *Analysis and Science in Aristotle*, pp. 207–11. See also Wians, 'Aristotle, Demonstration, and Teaching'. The more standard view is that Aristotle develops his account of scientific knowledge in opposition to Plato rather than the Sophists. See Ferejohn, *The Origins of Aristotelian Science*, pp. 6–7; Livesey, 'Metabasis: The Interrelationship of the Sciences', pp. 5–11. All agree that Aristotle was opposing science to that which is *not* knowledge, not setting a standard against which the various disciplines could be ranked hierarchically as more or less scientific. It is the latter which becomes an important, though not the only, issue explored in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.

³ John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, ed. and trans. by McGarry, Bk IV, ch. 6 (p. 212).

Grosseteste first confronts Aristotle's definition of science when commenting on chapter 2 of Book I of the *Posterior Analytics*.⁴ In this chapter, Aristotle describes *epistemê* as knowledge that is necessary and certain. Grosseteste adds that the term *scientia* and the accompanying verb *scire* are applicable to all the practical and speculative sciences in an analogical sense. Science may be said *communiter* of the knowledge of purely 'erratic' events; it is said *proprie* of the knowledge gained from a study of the natural world where causal connections hold either necessarily or 'for the most part' (*frequentibus*); it is said 'more properly' (*magis proprie*) of those things that always happen in the same way; science applies to mathematics in this most proper sense since knowledge of both its principles and its conclusions is equally necessary and equally knowable.⁵ Only the subject matters of metaphysics and mathematics display this kind of strict necessity.⁶ Finally *scientia* applies 'most properly' (*maxime proprie*) to knowledge of what is immutable when it is known through its cause, which is immutable in its being and causing.⁷

Grosseteste returns to this same theme later in his commentary when discussing the degree of certainty common to the three theoretical disciplines.⁸ He complains that Aristotle has not really proved his claim that knowledge of objects that do not inhere in matter is more certain than knowledge of objects that do so inhere.⁹ Grosseteste explains why this is so, using his own conception of a hierarchical organization of reality in which things are ordered by their proximity to the 'first light'. Those sciences are more certain whose objects are 'closer to the spiritual light', i.e., more knowable in themselves:

⁴ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I. 2, 71b10–25.

⁵ Grosseteste, *Commentarius in posteriorum analyticorum libros*, ed. by Rossi, I. 2 (p. 99). Grosseteste's commentary is cited here and below by the book and chapter number he is commenting on in Aristotle's text and the page number in Rossi's edition.

⁶ Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 18 (p. 264).

⁷ Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 2 (p. 99). The fourth and most proper definition does not add anything to the third definition in terms of the things or events known; both are immutable. But it adds a condition about the way they are known, i.e., through their causes. Hence the fourth level differentiates between knowledge of principles and conclusions; principles are not known through demonstration but are the starting points for demonstration. Knowledge of conclusions, on the other hand, is science strictly speaking since it is knowledge of what is necessary and knowledge through the cause. (cf. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I. 2, 71a9–13)

⁸ He is commenting on Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I. 27, 87a31–36.

⁹ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I. 27, 87a31–36.

Those which are prior are closer to the spiritual light, by whose superfusion intelligible things become visible in act, are more receptive of this light and more penetrable to the sight of the mind, and hence, more certain. Science of these [things closer to the light] is more certain. Considered in this way, science of incorporeal, separate substances is more certain than the science of incorporeal substance linked to body, and [science] of these is more certain than science of corporeal substance.¹⁰

In support of this claim, Grosseteste repeats Aristotle's view that the study of the soul is more certain than natural science in general.¹¹

This passage assigns certainty to the sciences on the basis of the class of objects that they study, in terms of what makes objects knowable in themselves (as opposed to knowable to us). On this scale, metaphysics is the most knowable, mathematics next, and physics the least certain of the speculative sciences. In these passages Grosseteste determines the degree of certainty for the various sciences based on the degree of immutability of the science's object of study; the more immutable, the more certain the science. This is a mark of his Platonism.

However, Grosseteste qualifies this Platonic picture, making mathematics the most certain and the most scientific of the disciplines because of the status of its objects as most intelligible not *per se* but *quoad nos*. The objects of mathematics are spontaneously (*sponte*) available to our intellects while those of logic and metaphysics, by contrast, are so removed from sense knowledge that we are frequently deceived about their nature; likewise, in natural science the objects are mutable so that we are less certain about their nature.¹² Hence, logic and metaphysics are called 'rational' or 'probable' rather than 'scientific' knowledge because of the distance of their objects from our knowing powers; physics, on the other hand, is called so because of the distance of its objects from the source of intelligibility.¹³ Things more divine, more abstract and distant from matter

¹⁰ Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 17 (p. 256). 'Que enim priora sunt, propinquiora sunt luci spirituali, cuius superfusione res intelligibiles ab aspectu mentis fiunt actu visibiles et magis sunt receptibilia illius lucis et magis penetrabilia ab aspectu mentis, unde et certiora sunt, et scientia, que de his est, est scientia certior. Secundum hunc modum scientia de substantiis incorporeis separatim certior est scientia de substantiis incorporeis ligatis cum corpore, et hec iterum certior est quam scientia de substantiis corporeis.'

¹¹ Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima*, 402a1–4.

¹² Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 11 (p. 179).

¹³ Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 11 (p. 179). 'Et has tres, scilicet logicam, metaphysicam et naturalem, vocat Aristoteles rationales, quia propter parvitatem certitudinis comprehensionis istarum quodammodo versatur in his rationaliter magis et probabiliter quam scientificè, licet in his sit scientia et demonstratio, sed non maxime dicta. In solis enim mathematicis est scientia et demonstratio maxime et principaliter dicta.'

would be more knowable to the unfallen human mind, unclouded by phantasms, Grosseteste explains, but to those weighed down by the corruption of the body and affection for corporeal things, mathematical objects are the ‘most certain’ since in their comprehension we are aided by phantasms.¹⁴

This fit between our minds and mathematical objects leads to different methods or different degrees of success with similar methods. In mathematics, Grosseteste claims, it is easier to reduce what is known to its principles because we know that the middle term belongs essentially to the subject. In the other sciences, there are a variety of middle terms that may or may not lead to a conclusion that is the most probable. In such cases, we are obliged to consider all the possible middle terms in order to find the best one.¹⁵ Because in mathematics the conclusion reached is both the cause and the definition, the resolution of the conclusion into principles is clear from the composition of the original syllogism.¹⁶ Thus while the other sciences must sometimes use induction to reach conclusions or resolve to principles, Grosseteste points out, mathematics always uses deduction.¹⁷

The distinction between natural science as ‘rational’ and the mathematics as ‘teachable’ is traditional, going back to Boethius’s *De trinitate*.¹⁸ Gundissalinus, an important figure for transmitting Al-Farabi’s views on the sciences to the Latin West, also argued that natural science is best described as *rationale* because it uses the dialectical syllogism and, thus, can reach only probable conclusions.¹⁹ The mathematical disciplines, by contrast, use the demonstrative syllogism and, thus, produce certainty and are science in the strictest sense. Grosseteste, however, describes not just physics but also logic and metaphysics as ‘rational’ rather than ‘demonstrative’ not because of the lack of intelligibility and regularity displayed by their subject matter, but because of the nature of our knowing powers. Grosseteste measures the various disciplines with the yardstick of certainty on both ontological and methodological criteria. Our

¹⁴ Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 17 (p. 257). While reliance on sense images or phantasms is less productive of knowledge for the mind before the fall and the need to rely on sensation is a punishment for sin, fallen human nature is more able to know that which can be known through sensation than that which is immaterial.

¹⁵ Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 11 (pp. 182–83).

¹⁶ Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 11 (p. 183).

¹⁷ Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 11 (pp. 178–79).

¹⁸ Boethius, *De trinitate*, ed. by Rand, 2 (p. 8).

¹⁹ Dominicus Gundissalinus, *De divisione philosophiae*, ed. by Baur, p. 27.

greater ability to grasp the natures and middle terms of mathematical objects, which makes mathematics more perfectly deductive and, hence, more certain, depends both on the nature of the objects themselves and on the limitations of our knowing powers.

Grosseteste distinguishes between scientific and other modes of knowing in another way that involves certainty, one which breaks more thoroughly with Platonic notions of certainty and its value. Grosseteste argues that what is peculiar to scientific knowledge (as opposed to intellectual knowledge) is that what we come to know scientifically is always what we first doubted or what appeared false to us. (This is because science, unlike *intellectus*, is *acquired* knowledge, so in science we move from not knowing to knowing.)²⁰ The only propositions which cannot be doubted are the 'axioms of scientific thought', i.e., those in which the predicate is recognized as identical to the subject; these are the only claims to which there can be no objection and which are immediately accepted by all.²¹ Grosseteste, then, introduces the notion of doubt as a positive feature of scientific knowledge: the domain of science is the realm of what we do not know and about which we can raise questions. We can connect this to Grosseteste's fledgling notion of the necessity of 'testing' scientific hypotheses. Grosseteste describes a process of experiment (*experientia*) in which 'the awakened reason begins to wonder and to consider whether things really are as the notion in the memory says, and these two lead the reason to an experiment (*experientia*).'²² Grosseteste's example, lifted from Avicenna through the mediation of Al-Ghazali, is giving scammony to someone to eat 'after all the other causes of purging red bile have been isolated and removed' in order to figure out whether, indeed, as suspected, scammony does cause the purging of red bile.²³ While there is much debate about the degree to which this process

²⁰ Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 1 (p. 94).

²¹ Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 8 (p. 158).

²² Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 14 (p. 215), trans. in Marrone, *William of Auvergne and Robert Grosseteste*, p. 274. 'Et ex hac intentione estimate frequenter et in memoria expurgiscitur ratio, que expurgata incipit admirari et considerare an res se habeat sicut dicti estimatio memorata. Et hec duo convertunt rationem ad experientiam'.

²³ Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 14 (p. 215). Cf. Marrone, *William of Auvergne and Robert Grosseteste*, p. 274. Marrone cites the work of Julius Weinberg as having located the source from which Grosseteste takes the example, originally in Avicenna's *Logic* but repeated in Al-Ghazali's *Logic*, the first part of his *Tendencies of the Philosophers*. See Weinberg, *Abstraction, Relation, and Induction*, pp. 133–35; Marrone, *William of Auvergne and Robert Grosseteste*, p. 273.

anticipates modern notions of controlled experiment, what is of interest in the present context about this passage is its embrace of uncertainty as a necessary stage in the acquisition of scientific knowledge.²⁴

As Richard Southern points out, the opening sentence of Grosseteste's commentary on the *Posterior Analytics* makes a point of noting the role of doubt as the beginning of our knowledge of principles. Grosseteste begins by disagreeing with Aristotle's opening claim (in the Latin version Grosseteste consulted) that all knowledge comes from pre-existing knowledge. Grosseteste comments, 'I say that knowledge of principles is not acquired by instruction since we are not taught nor do we add to our knowledge unless that which we first conceive is either doubtful to us or apparently false, and after doubting or holding the contrary opinion the truth becomes manifest to us'.²⁵ Southern also claims, with some justification, that Grosseteste's commentary is generally more taken with the physical examples Aristotle uses to illustrate the logical form of demonstration rather than with the logical form that is Aristotle's subject. Grosseteste seems to put into practice this model of wondering inquiry in the examination of phenomena and search for hitherto unknown explanations as he reflects on the examples in Aristotle's text.²⁶

²⁴ See Crombie, *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science*, pp. 61–90 and the critique of Crombie's views by Serene, 'Robert Grosseteste on Induction and Demonstrative Science'. See also Marrone, *William of Auvergne and Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 273–86. See also Hackett, 'Scientia Experimentalis: From Robert Grosseteste to Roger Bacon', pp. 103–07. At issue is, first, whether the *experimentum* is simply personal experience or something closer to controlled experiment and, second, whether the need for *experimentum* is only for the intuition of principles or also as a kind of confirmation of the conclusions of scientific inquiry.

²⁵ Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, ed. by Rossi, I. 1 (p. 94), 'Et dico quod scientia principiorum non est acquisita per doctrinam, quia non docemur vel addiscimus nisi illud quod cum primo concipimus est nobis dubium vel apparet falsum et post dubitationem vel contrariam opinionem manifestatur nobis eius veritas'. Southern cites the Latin translation of Aristotle Grosseteste is commenting on as, 'omnis scientia acquisita per doctrinam et disciplina [...] est ex pre-existente cognitione', which is a bit different than the Greek text in modern use which reads, 'all teaching and all learning by argument comes from preexistent knowledge'. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I. 1, 71a1–3. Nonetheless, Grosseteste's insertion of the importance of knowledge beginning in doubt is significant.

²⁶ See Southern, *Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 155–69. Southern's view that Grosseteste's model of scientific investigation is more oriented towards the observation of individual events than the use of scholastic method, to analyse concepts, is supported by Southern's controversial claim that Grosseteste was not educated at Paris but in Lincoln and Cambridge and steeped in a distinctly English scientific tradition. Eastwood raises questions about the evidence for the latter claim about where Grosseteste studied and to Southern's contrast between a particularly English

Still, Grosseteste's Platonism ultimately grounds his account of the virtues of mathematics and the shortcomings of the other sciences. The certainty of mathematics is based on two things. First, its objects are in themselves more stable and knowable than things in matter and motion, and, second, those mathematical notions are, he claims, applicable to the objects of natural philosophy.²⁷ Grosseteste takes the biblical claim that God creates 'according to number, weight, and measure' in a new and explicitly mathematical direction, asserting that the universe is mathematical in its created structure. But he also holds that those mathematical notions, especially geometrical figures, can be used to simplify more complex physical realities.²⁸ Knowing material things by reducing them to mathematical structure is, for Grosseteste, a step closer to what it would be like to know them through their exemplary forms. To know through the forms or divine ideas is to know something complex and multiple in a simple and unified intuition relating the one to the many.

In Grosseteste's follower, Roger Bacon, we move further from the Platonic map of certainty and uncertainty and closer to modern notions. For Roger Bacon (b. 1214/20–d. 1292), very much an advocate of the new model of science found in Aristotle, uncertainty becomes more of a virtue and certainty, at least of a more traditional sort, more of a vice. Bacon is clearly influenced, as was Grosseteste, by the Arabic thinkers, and scholars agree that the elements of experimentalism in both thinkers have their roots in Arabic science.²⁹ More than Grosseteste, Bacon takes up their rhetoric touting the method of demonstration for its certainty and criticizing the alternatives characterized as mere opinion. Though Averroes's version of this position may not be one Bacon knew, a passage from Averroes very strikingly captures the view we also find in

scientific tradition and the Parisian scholastic one. See Eastwood, 'Review of *Robert Grosseteste*'.

²⁷ See Grosseteste, *De Lineis, Angulis et Figuris*, quoted and translated in McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, p. 168, from Ludwig Baur's edition, *Die Philosophischen Werke des Robert Grosseteste*, parts 1–5, 59–60. It is unclear, for Grosseteste, whether or not natural phenomena can be understood 'scientifically' without being subsumed under mathematical principles. Cf. Wallace, *Causality and Scientific Explanation*, pp. 31–40.

²⁸ On Grosseteste's notion of physical reality as constructed on mathematical principles, see McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 178–80 and Grosseteste, *Commentarius in VIII libros physicorum Aristotelis*, ed. by Dales, pp. 93–97.

²⁹ On the Greek and Arabic scientific texts becoming available in the second half of the twelfth century, see Crombie, *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science*, pp. 35–36. See also Hackett, 'Roger Bacon on *Scientia Experimentalis*', pp. 287–90.

Bacon: that demonstration is productive of the only real certainty.³⁰ Averroes opposes the certainty of demonstration to the lack of certainty in consensus. Consensus, agreement amongst authorities, is taken to be a root of the Law, after the Qur'an and tradition, and Averroes takes up the question of what to prefer in a conflict between consensus and demonstration. *If*, he explains, we could have *certain* consensus, *then* it would be appropriate to prefer consensus to demonstration. However, consensus can never be complete and certain because any communal agreement is necessarily limited only to a certain period of time and requires complete knowledge of every scholar's publicly and privately held views, as well as certain lines of transmission of opinion, and full agreement on a single literal rather than allegorical or hidden meaning.³¹ Meeting such a standard for consensus, Averroes well knows, is impossible and, thus, the undisputed palm goes to demonstration.

For my purposes what is so interesting about this passage is the way in which Averroes introduces uncertainty into that which previously had been the standard for rational certainty: consensus by rational experts. He does so by setting the standards for certainty impossibly high. There can in such a context be no appeal to what 'everyone' accepts or believes because no complete inventory of 'everyone' or their beliefs is possible. Demonstration, by contrast, does not depend on the always incomplete surveys of expert opinion but rather on necessary and self-evident premises (which all must accept), from which conclusions are drawn by valid syllogistic arguments. Averroes, of course, has an agenda in all this; like a salesman with a new product, he must first produce the trilogy of fear, uncertainty, and doubt (known in business speak as 'FUD') in the old product so that having lost faith in the old (traditional consensus), we will turn to the new (demonstrative science).

Bacon takes up a similar position in favour of Aristotelian and experimental science over tradition and opinion, though unlike Averroes his target is not traditional authorities on religious matters but authorities in the non-theological disciplines. Roger Bacon's *Opus maius* (1267–68) was composed to

³⁰ Jeremiah Hackett has argued that Averroes's position on the 'harmony between philosophy and religion' as found in his *Decisive Treatise* resembles Bacon's so strongly that it constitutes evidence that Averroes's treatise is 'the unnamed book that inspired the form and content of the *Opus maius*'. My argument is that there is a similarity as well between Averroes's rhetoric undermining traditional authority to make way for the new science of demonstration in the *Decisive Treatise* and Bacon's undermining of the certainty of the other modes of knowing. See Hackett, 'Averroes and Roger Bacon'.

³¹ Averroes, *The Book of the Decisive Treatise*, trans. by Butterworth, pp. 11 and 52, n. 16.

be sent to the Pope as a defence of the new science.³² Bacon's goal is to replace the traditional canon and methods of the liberal arts with science, and to push back against the canon lawyers and theologians at Paris who instigated the bans on Aristotle and scientific works, in particular, Arabic astronomy and astrology.³³ His argument for the new curriculum has several prongs: first, polemical criticism of authority, tradition, and common opinion; second, advocacy of the study of the original languages of scientific and biblical texts in order to establish their claims with greater certainty; third, an account of the relationship between philosophy and theology in which both essentially critique and overcome the uncertainty in the other, and fourth, an argument for the centrality and certainty of the mathematical sciences in the understanding of reality.

Bacon's polemical part I enumerates four causes of error. These are: 1) submission to faulty authority (being careful not to critique legitimate authority — he is after all writing to the Pope), 2) the influence of custom, 3) popular prejudice, and 4) the desire to conceal ignorance and appear wise. The first three amount to different ways of describing prevailing opinion — what Averroes might have called consensus — as unreliable, and the fourth speaks to the human desire to be an authority or an arbiter of opinion. Any time any of these versions of common opinion coincides with truth is for Bacon analogous to the way that a stopped clock is right twice a day. In short, it is rare and accidental. Bacon, echoing Avicenna and Averroes, administers a strong dose of esotericism,

³² References are made to the text as Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, followed by the part, chapter, and page number in Bridges's edition. Translations are my own but I have consulted the translation of Robert Belle Burke, *The 'Opus majus' of Roger Bacon*. (The Latin edition is not up to contemporary standards, so my conclusions about Bacon can only be conditional; though the English translation is not egregiously misleading, pieces of the text have been moved to different places in the translation; the manuscript tradition presented a difficult set of conflicts even when these were originally published, now almost a hundred years ago.)

³³ While Bacon was a staunch defender of the value of Arabic science, he argues against the Averroistic view of the unity of the agent intellect in all human beings, instead identifying the agent intellect with God. In the *Opus maius* Bacon discusses the nature of the agent intellect in the context of the way in which truth, always and wholly found in Christ, is found in some measure in the philosophers, from the divine light flowing into their minds. This point serves to introduce the doctrine of the unity of the intellect and Bacon spends several pages arguing that such a view is inconsistent with Aristotle's text, anthropology, and physics, and falsely makes the human intellect dependent on the angels or intelligences rather than directly on God. See Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, II. 5 (pp. 46–49). My surmise is that Bacon so wants to promote the 'new science' of the Arabs that he must strongly reject monopsychism, which he knows has and will cause reactionary responses to Arabic and Aristotelian thought, in order to show that the science can be disengaged from this psychology.

undermining any sense that truth can be contained in popular opinion or will come out in the marketplace of ideas. Error and uncertainty rule the day.

The antidote to these errors is, Bacon explains, to ‘replace weak authorities with strong, custom with reason, and the feelings of the vulgar with the opinions of the holy or wise’.³⁴ In order to avoid these errors and find our way to true authorities, reason, and the wise, we must, Bacon argues, ‘freely hear what is contrary to vulgar convention’.³⁵ The point seems to be to examine received opinion critically, to take the opposite side of a question from that which is accepted by common opinion. One must, in other words, cultivate scepticism about what is usually thought. Truth is usually on the side of what is unpopular, Bacon warns, so one can make a practice of scepticism about what the masses think as a way of avoiding error more effectively. It is hard not to hear in these criticisms of authority, tradition, and common sense echoes (or rather the opposite of echoes, a kind of preparatory throat clearing) of that *other* Bacon, Francis, and his critique of the ‘idols of the mind’.³⁶

The fourth cause of error, the wish to seem wise and to avoid looking ignorant, sounds much like Hobbes’s notion of the desire we have to ‘glory’ over one another.³⁷ As an antidote, Bacon again recommends an attitude of scepticism. ‘Since the truths about God and his creatures are infinite, and in each there are innumerable gradations, it follows that few things are known by any one, and thus no one should glory in the many things he knows’.³⁸ Uncertainty about so much is not just a fact for Bacon but what we should embrace rather than paper over as the only path towards greater knowledge and certainty.³⁹

Bacon’s discussion of mathematics begins with an extended encomium of it as the easiest, most accessible of the disciplines, providing the model and example for the rest. Bacon concludes that only mathematics can be free from doubt

³⁴ Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, I. 8 (p. 17). ‘Remedium vero contra haec tria non est, nisi ut tota virtute auctores validos fragilibus, consuetudini rationem, sensibus vulgi sententias sanctorum aut sapientum reponamus’.

³⁵ Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, I. 8 (p. 17). ‘Et licet totus mundus sit his causis erroris occupatus, tamen audiamus libenter contraria consuetudini vulgatae’.

³⁶ Bacon, *Novum Organon*, Book I, aphorisms 38–68, in Bacon, *The Instauration magna*, ed. by Rees and Wakely, pp. 79–108.

³⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Gaskin, I. 13 (pp. 83–84).

³⁸ Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, I. 10 (p. 21). ‘Quod cum infinitae sunt veritates Domini et creaturarum, atque in qualibet sunt gradus innumerabiles, oportet quod pauca sciatur a quolibet, et ideo de multitudine scitorum non oportet quicquam gloriari’.

³⁹ Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, I. 10 (p. 22).

and only mathematics can proceed by demonstration.⁴⁰ Therefore, the way to 'arrive at certainty without doubt and truth without error' is to ground all the other sciences in mathematics.⁴¹ 'A science which is full of doubts and sprinkled with opinions and obscurities cannot be rendered certain, nor made manifest, nor verified except by some other science known and verified, certain and plain to us', and that other science can only be mathematics.⁴²

Averroes casts doubt and uncertainty on the consensus of the theologians and offers his new product, philosophical/metaphysical demonstration, as capable of offering true support for theological conclusions. Similarly, Bacon wants to turn his audience, the pope, to mathematics as that on which metaphysics, physics, morals, logic, and grammar depend and as the only true source of certainty and truth.⁴³ To this end, he must undermine confidence in the other authoritative disciplines so that there is a stronger motive to seek a new foundational science.⁴⁴ Nothing could be more modern.

Aristotelian science, as filtered through Arabic sources, includes for Bacon not just demonstrative syllogistic form but *experimentum*. As with Grosseteste, there is great debate about exactly what Bacon means by this: is it experience/*empeiria* in Aristotle's sense or something closer to the modern notion of 'experiment' or 'controlled experiment'?⁴⁵ Bacon introduces another step to Aristotle's process of reaching demonstrative conclusions, for he insists that results by reasoning must be confirmed by *experimentum*. While Aristotle describes the path of the discovery of the *principles* of science by a kind of induction in the famous metaphor of soldiers after a rout returning to form a line, Bacon notes the necessity of *experimentum* to confirm *conclusions* in the sciences.⁴⁶ Knowledge by means of reasoning to conclusions via argument is not enough to produce certainty, Bacon argues; the removal of doubt requires the discovery of conclusions by the path of experience as well.⁴⁷ The path to cer-

⁴⁰ Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, IV, dist. 1, cap. 2 (p. 105).

⁴¹ Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, IV, dist. 1, cap. 2 (p. 106); cap. 1 (pp. 97–98).

⁴² Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, IV, dist. 1, cap. 2 (p. 107).

⁴³ See above, n. 36; Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, IV, dist. 1, cap. 3 (pp. 103–08).

⁴⁴ Cf. Molland, 'Roger Bacon's Knowledge of Mathematics', pp. 163–64.

⁴⁵ For a brief and fairly recent account of the modern debates over this issue in Bacon, see Hackett, 'Roger Bacon on *Scientia Experimentalis*', pp. 279–84.

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, II. 19, 100a1–14; Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, VI (pp. 172–73).

⁴⁷ Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, VI (p. 167). The precise role of experience here is

tainty, we see clearly, goes through experimental science; only by this path can trickery and magic be distinguished from art and nature, Bacon argues.⁴⁸ The advent of this new science inspired by Aristotle but with a new emphasis on *experimentum*, becomes a path to certainty, but it is a path made less than certain by the fact that true *experimentum* can be confused with trickery and magic.

In Bacon and Grosseteste, the claim of certainty for mathematics opens up possibilities of uncertainty in other fields of study. Similarly, the claim of certainty for *experimentum* at the same time opens up the possibility of uncertainty about being able to distinguish true experience from false. We see in their work that the movements towards certainty and uncertainty are not sequential, at least not exclusively. Thus, there was not first an era of rationalism and optimism followed by an era of scepticism or vice versa. In the re-emergence of Aristotle's notion of science, we enter an age of *both* certainty and uncertainty.

*William of Auvergne and the 'Summa fratris Alexandri':
The Merit of Belief and the Affective Certainty of Faith*

While Bacon boldly tries to turn the new science into an aid and support for theology, William of Auvergne and the *Summa fratris Alexandri* respond differently to the move by Grosseteste, Bacon, and others to privilege the new science as certain and downgrade other kinds of knowledge as uncertain. William and 'Alexander' want to protect sacred study from the charge that it lacks rigor and certainty even as in subtle ways they allow the language and categories of Aristotelian science to reconfigure sacred study.

William of Auvergne (1180–1249) was bishop of Paris from 1228 to 1249. His major work, *Magisterium divinale ac sapientiale*, consists of seven treatises, two of which, *De anima* and *De universo*, were probably composed after he became bishop between 1231 and 1236.⁴⁹ The *Magisterium* is both a philosophical defence of Christian views against the errors of the philosophers and an

not clear. Bacon gives the example of someone who has never seen a fire: with only the idea or notion of fire, he would not know enough to avoid being burned. He also argues that one needs actual, drawn lines to understand Euclid's geometry. On the role of experience here see Hackett, 'Roger Bacon on *Scientia Experimentalis*', p. 291.

⁴⁸ Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. by Bridges, VI (pp. 172, 221). On Bacon and magic, see Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, II: *During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era* (1929), p. 666, and Molland, 'Roger Bacon and the Hermetic Tradition'.

⁴⁹ Kramp, 'Des Wilhelms von Auvergne "*Magisterium Divinale*"'.

effort to probe the depths of revealed theology. William shows some understanding of Aristotle's views of science and the origins of science in sense knowledge, and he incorporates some of these views into his epistemology. William sets out to defend the 'universal truth' (*veritatem commune*) by means of 'irrefragable proofs' and writes of his aim to use Aristotle to produce 'demonstrative certitude, after which you are left without any trace of doubt'.⁵⁰ Thus, in *De universo*, William rejects arguments from authority and instead uses philosophical arguments to refute error and establish the truth and produce certainty. This 'natural knowledge', the knowledge of the philosophers, is strongly contrasted with the stance of faith. The question raised by this contrast is what the value of rational, demonstrative arguments to support the claims of faith is. William takes up this question in *De fide*, in which he argues that belief sustained by rational proof is less virtuous than belief as a commitment to what is not known with certainty.

William conceives of philosophical/scientific knowledge as the work of the autonomous and active human intellect, and he strongly rejected (as did Bacon) monopsychism. Though William rejects any sense of the intellect's passivity to the senses or an agent intellect, he asserts that the senses have a crucial role to play in the development of knowledge, not 'impressing' the passive intellect but triggering the intellect to actively produce the forms of things itself. Thus, William has a strong sense of the intellect's sufficiency to generate certain knowledge, only indirectly dependent on the senses and not at all on an agent intellect; hence, he must equally reject the notion that intellect of itself could generate theological knowledge. However, William, equally vehemently construes any use of knowledge produced by the human intellect on matters of faith as an inappropriate dependence of faith on reason.⁵¹

Roland Teske makes a strong argument that this tension between engaging in and criticizing the support of faith by reason in William does not amount to contradiction. In Teske's view William clearly distinguishes between two

⁵⁰ William of Auvergne, *De universo*, Part III of Part II, cap. 6, in *Opera omnia*, I, 1028E; William of Auvergne, *De anima*, cap. 1, pars. 1, in *Opera omnia*, II, suppl., 65b. All passages from William of Auvergne's works are cited from *Guillelmi Alverni Episcopi Parisiensis opera omnia*, 2 vols (Paris: [n. publ.], 1674; facsimile repr. Frankfurt a.M.: Minerva, 1963) by the original divisions in the text and volume and page numbers. These passages are also cited in Teske, 'William of Auvergne on the Relation between Reason and Faith', p. 186.

⁵¹ For William's arguments against monopsychism, see Teske, 'William of Auvergne on the Individuation of Souls'. For a very clear account of William's account of natural knowledge, see Marrone, *William of Auvergne and Robert Grosseteste*, pp. 58–72.

modes of knowing, one by faith and another by proof or reason. The method of proof and investigation characterizes some of the parts of the *Magisterium*, while other parts are grounded in faith and revelation.⁵² Teske's solution seems to be the only way to make sense of the fact that at some points William argues without appealing to authority and produces demonstrative proofs but at other points claims, most strongly in *De fide*, that to support faith by reasons is to undermine its value.

What is of most interest for the topic of science and certainty is how strongly William is drawn to contrast faith and science in terms of certainty when he is supporting knowing by faith over knowing by means of scientific methods.⁵³ William begins *De fide* by asserting the superiority of knowing by faith to the knowledge produced by any 'mundane philosophical discipline'.⁵⁴ Faith is defined in a preliminary way as the virtue of correct and firm belief.⁵⁵ However, there are different species of 'firm belief' depending on the amount of evidence given to support the belief, just as there are many species of love depending on why the object of love is loved:

Just as it is one thing to love someone because of his merit or to love something because it is pleasant or useful [...] and something else [to love] from the virtue of loving, so it is one thing to believe on the basis of probability or evidence, and something else to believe from the virtue of believing itself.⁵⁶

William extends his metaphor: as probable proof is to the intellect, so is light to sight, the pleasant and the useful to the affections, and heat to touch.⁵⁷ It is natural, William claims, to love what is pleasant or useful, to be heated by what

⁵² Teske, 'William of Auvergne on the Relation between Reason and Faith', pp. 187–93. Cf. Corti, 'Le sette parti del Magisterium Divinale ac Sapientiale di Guglielmo di Auvergne'.

⁵³ *De fide* appears as the first part of the *Magisterium* in the edition we have, though Corti argued that it should perhaps be placed as the fifth part based on an alternative manuscript reading. See Corti, 'Le sette parti del Magisterium Divinale ac Sapientiale di Guglielmo di Auvergne', p. 301.

⁵⁴ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 1C.

⁵⁵ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 2H.

⁵⁶ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 2H: 'Quemadmodum enim aliud est diligere aliquem ex meritis suis, sive aliquid ex suavitate, vel utilitate, qua suave est, vel utile diligenti aliquid, aut ex virtute ipsius diligentis; sic aliud est credere ex probabilitate, sive ex evidentia ipsius crediti, aliud ex virtute credentis'.

⁵⁷ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 2F–G.

is hot, to see light, and to assent intellectually to what is probable. William concludes:

To love and desire the useful is nothing other than to allow the entry of what desires to enter or [to allow] fire to heat, which is the proper work of its nature. Indeed, it is no less natural for spiritual fire than corporeal fire [to heat], and in almost the same way as fire heats is the probable or manifestly true believed. It is nothing other than seeing light or being illuminated by light.⁵⁸

But William interprets the 'naturalness' of the love of the pleasant or the useful in a negative way. Our natural loves, those 'spiritual fires' that heat the soul just as fire heats the body, are different forms of concupiscence.⁵⁹ Thus, William concludes, just as love is not virtuous unless it fights against these 'natural desires', so believing is no virtue unless it fights against our natural tendency to believe the probable: 'It is manifest that to believe the improbable is fortitude and the strength of our intellect, just as to love the damned and dishonoured is fortitude and the strength of our affections.'⁶⁰

William also strongly distinguishes faith from belief in things based on their relative probability of being true. Probability engenders not faith but rather intellectual belief which, William contends, is without virtue since it is based on a natural propensity to believe what is probable.⁶¹ He concludes, 'Believing, however, that which is not apparently true [...] is virtue.'⁶² And the faith that is a virtue in this sense is characterized as the foundation of religion; it is belief that is a free and vehement choice based on the virtue of believing alone.⁶³

William draws an extended analogy between belief supported by argument and walking with the support of a cane. Just as one who cannot walk without

⁵⁸ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 2G: 'Amare enim, atque desiderare utile, vel suave, non est nisi de admissio, velimmissio, et igne calere, hoc opus naturae proprie est, non enim minus naturale est igni spirituali, idem si admovetur, calefacere spiritualiter, quam igni corporali corporaliter, juxta hunc modum credere probabile, vel manifeste verum, nihil aliud est, quam videre lucidum, vel illuminari a lucido'.

⁵⁹ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 2G.

⁶⁰ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 2H: 'Manifestum igitur est, quod credere improbabilia, fortitudinis est, atque vigoris nostri intellectus, sicut amare damnosa, molesta, et ignominiosa fortitudinis est et vigoris nostri affectus'.

⁶¹ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 3D.

⁶² William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 4F: 'Credere autem ea quae non apparent esse vera, vel quae non videntur esse vera, hoc non est nisi virtutis'.

⁶³ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 4F.

the aid of a cane is weak or injured, belief that needs support from proofs is weak.⁶⁴

The philosophical intellect is like a man walking from conclusion to conclusion who does not use his own strength to support himself but transfers his weight to the aiding cane in order to move from something known or proved to something else.⁶⁵

The intellect that is strong enough to believe without these artificial supports, however, is moved by a greater and stronger belief.⁶⁶ In the same vein, he argues, the intellect that will not believe without some kind of evidence or proof is like a merchant who will not sell anything without some kind of security.⁶⁷ William concludes that the sort of belief that stands in need of support or security is not only not true faith but is an insult to God.⁶⁸ It is hard not to see William's stance here as defensive. Because faith cannot beat science on its own terms, he resorts to a moral distinction that, somewhat surprisingly, praises exactly what seems to make faith less than science: its uncertainty, its improbability.

Not content, however, simply to praise the virtue of faith over science, William also maintains that the knowledge of faith is, in its own way, truer and more certain than science. The secular arts contain knowledge that sees the mere shadow of outward things; the virtue of faith, on the other hand, is the fruit of a kind of smelling and tasting of the deep, inner reality of things.⁶⁹ Thus the sciences and arts work up from a consideration of the outward appearance of material things in the world, but faith, though it is not a 'seeing' of the true reality of things, is a foretaste of that reality arrived at by intimate contact with the inner reality of things. Warming to his subject, William goes so far as to say that science is like a doctor who makes the healthy weak; while faith is the fount of life, science's apparent successes are only like the tremors of the body after it is killed. Faith supported by evidence or probability or proof

⁶⁴ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 4G–5D.

⁶⁵ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 4H. 'Intellectus philosophans, est sicut viator ambulans a conclusione in conclusionem, non valens propria virtute sustenare semetipsum, sed adjutorio baculi se transferens, et transiliens ab uno noto, seu probate, ad aliud.'

⁶⁶ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 4H.

⁶⁷ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 5A–B.

⁶⁸ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 5C.

⁶⁹ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 5D. 'Ars enim omnis a rebus est, tamquam umbra vel descriptio imaginum resultatium in speculo intellectus, virtus autem quae a rebus est, sicut consuetudinales, et forte quaedam aliae, non sicut umbra vel picture est a rebus et rerum forinseca, sed sicut odor vel sapor est a rerum intimo, vel profundo.'

or signs is neither religion, nor obedience, nor veneration of God.⁷⁰ Evidence, proofs, signs, William notes, cause the struggles (*bella*) of the intellect to cease but the ensuing victory is also the loss of all the good things promised to those who believe.⁷¹

Faith is, then, more certain than art or knowledge because, even though it is not full knowledge, it is a certainty that descends from God to us without the mediation of the material, visible thing. William likens faith to a more direct reception of light than science. 'The light which descends from the first light is nobler, and more sublime than that light which descends through reflection from that which has been illuminated'.⁷² Faith descends directly from the first light, but the light of the sciences is a reflected light that works by the light of things that they receive from the first light. The 'natural' and reflected lights by which the sciences work (the senses, probabilities, pleasure, signs, and testimony) are, William concludes, vanquished by faith in the sacrament of the Eucharist, a case in which the natural light of the sense of sight, if followed, would lead us to the conclusion that what is present on the altar is mere bread rather than the body and blood of Christ.⁷³

It is important to note that William is not here contrasting *theology* with the arts, but *faith*, the beginning point of theology, with science. His statements in *De fide* do not preclude the possibility of using material from the arts in theology, or the use of reason to understand matters of faith; what they do preclude is making science a replacement for faith. This explains why William's disparagement of natural knowledge seems only to emerge when the context is the comparison of science to faith; in other texts of the *primum magisterium*, William speaks as optimistically as Roger Bacon about the power of scientific investigation and reasoning to produce certainty. William's warnings about the limitations of reason in matters of faith focus on the new temptation posed by demonstrative science — a temptation to transform what is known by faith into things known with scientific certitude.

Two factors, I think, lead William to contrast scientific reasoning with faith in such extreme terms, one dealing with 'faith' and another dealing with 'science': his vehement concern to 'save' faith from the encroachments of science

⁷⁰ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 7B–D.

⁷¹ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 7C–D.

⁷² William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 6E. 'Sic lumina a prima luce de descendencia, nobiliora ac sublimiora sunt, quam ea quae ex illuminatione per reflexionem descendunt'.

⁷³ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 6H.

(which is not the same as excluding reason from theology), and his naïveté about the complexities of how knowledge arises from the senses and the conditions of the possibility of demonstrative science. He thinks of science as a kind of machine producing certain, demonstrative conclusions, which is, thus, able to threaten the deep *sapientia* of faith illuminated by revelation, the product of the assent of the will.

Nonetheless, even as William contrasts faith to science, he also remakes faith in science's image. He points out that since the mind cannot recognize and confess belief in an infinite that it can neither know nor name, a determinate number of things must be proposed for belief. Because of the 'narrowness of the understanding and lack of discipline of the vulgar, and all the simple and the uneducated,' certain apprehension is impossible. Hence, William argues, faith requires a finite number of basic and clear fundamental principles, which are called the 'articles of faith.'⁷⁴ These articles, William continues, must be accepted by all men, without exception.⁷⁵ Only by the same confession of belief can there be a unity among the community of believers and a unity of religion.⁷⁶

What is worth noting is that though William has rejected a direct importation of the criteria for science into faith, he has, whether wittingly or not, articulated the nature of faith in a way that echoes some of Aristotle's requirements for science: a unified subject matter and universally accepted, certain principles. Arithmetic and geometry, William notes, are diverse sciences because they are concerned with diverse things, but faith is one because given by the one God to the unified intellective power.⁷⁷ Though many things are believed, there is unity in that by which they are believed, through principles and those things drawn from principles, some that are 'the primitive roots and fundamentals, other like rays descending from those roots'.⁷⁸ The pattern of roots or foundations from which other things are derived is a clear echo of Aristotle's deductive model of science as conclusions drawn from certain first principles.

⁷⁴ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 11F–H: 'Haec autem apprehensiones non possunt esse certitudines in communitate hominum propter brevitatem intellectus, et paucitatem exercitationis vulgi, omniumque simplicium, et indoctorum.'

⁷⁵ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 11E.

⁷⁶ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 11H.

⁷⁷ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 9D.

⁷⁸ William of Auvergne, *De fide*, I. 10E: 'Communiter autem credendorum quae usualiter articuli fidei vocantur, alia sunt ut radices primitivae, et fundamenta primaria, alia sunt sicut rami descendentes ab hujusmodi radicibus et sicut partes divisionis.'

Even more tellingly, though William vehemently rejects the quest for scientific certitude in matters of faith, he finds a kind of certainty in faith in its fundamental principles, the 'articles of faith', which must be accepted by everyone. William calls the 'articles of faith' 'first principles'. Though these principles of faith are not supported by their self-evidence to the intellect but by vehement voluntary commitment, assent to them must be universal and unequivocal; they are the basis for all further discussion. What began sounding, at least to modern ears, like faith as an embrace of what is not just uncertain but improbable, ends in a kind of fundamentalism in the etymological sense. That is, it ends in the sense that there must be a foundation, a basic and clear set of beliefs that must simply be accepted as necessary truth without further discussion. But as 'unscientific' as this kind of foundation for faith sounds, it is a reaction exactly to the criterion of science as proceeding from indubitable first principles. What is new here is not that William takes the basic claims of creed as beyond doubt but that he formulates that indubitable and universal character in terms that mirror the structure of Aristotelian science, as principles from which further conclusions can be drawn. Like some Christians who responded to the perceived assault on scripture's account of creation by Darwinian evolution by asserting the scientific truth of the creation story, William responds to the threat of Aristotelian science by asserting the science-like structure of the Christian belief system. William, unlike some Christian fundamentalists, tries to differentiate faith from science so that it will not have to compete on the same grounds and lose, but he also brings faith closer to science by giving faith foundational principles so that it can boast of the structure and certainty science also possesses.

The *Summa fratris Alexandri*, though much less extreme in its formulations, takes up some of the same issues raised by William of Auvergne in *De fide* about the certainty and scientific status of the claims of faith. In it we see how the notion of different kinds of disciplines with different kinds and sources of certainty makes its way into the discussion of science and theology as science, that will continue to be discussed throughout the thirteenth century and beyond.⁷⁹ The *Summa* maintains that *sacra theologia* is a science but qualifies

⁷⁹ Both the date and the authorship of this work have been the subject of great and sometimes polemical debate, the Franciscans arguing for Alexander of Hales as its single author and for dating it in the early thirteenth century, the Dominicans arguing against. It is now admitted to be a compilation of a group of Franciscan theologians, notably John of Rochelle. See Doucet, 'The History of the Problem of the Authenticity of the Summa'. See also Wass, *The Infinite God and the Summa Fratris Alexandri*, p. 6. Part I, on which all my comments are based, has always

this answer in some important ways. The *Summa* writers lay out three areas of difference between theology or sacred study and Aristotelian science, and these differences become the foundation for arguing for a different kind of certainty for sacred study from that of Aristotelian science. First, theology perfects the affections rather than the intellect; it is truly wisdom (*sapientia*) because it is cognition according to taste (*sapor*), and, second, it issues in action, moving the affections toward the good ‘through the principles of fear and love’.⁸⁰ Third, faith precedes understanding in theology, but in science understanding precedes faith or assent.⁸¹

These three differences between theology and philosophy form the basis for explaining the ‘certitude’ which marks faith as opposed to science and for justifying its mode of presentation in scripture. Less polemical than William, the writers of the *Summa* do not denigrate the value of scientific certainty but expand the notion of certitude into an analogous concept. Carrying forward the theme that theology is affective knowledge but conceding that science has greater *intellectual* certitude, the writers answer that the certitude of theology is *affective*, that of the sciences *experiential*. The certitude of the sciences is founded in the animal part of our nature; the certitude of theology in the spiritual soul. Certitude of the affections and of the spiritual soul is of a higher sort than that residing in our animal nature and derived from sense experience.⁸² The ‘spiritual man’, unlike the ‘animal man’, derives understanding and certitude from the spiritual meaning of scripture.⁸³

Having laid out these three differences between science and sacred theology, ‘Alexander’ then brings them to bear on an objection that echoes William’s concern: whether there can be proof of the things believed by reason. The first contra objection, put in the mouth of Gregory the Great, is William’s: faith proved by

been regarded as homogeneous in style, even by Mandonnet, who nevertheless thought that none of the *Summa* was authored by Alexander and that none of it was composed before the mid- or late thirteenth century.

⁸⁰ *Summa fratris Alexandri*, q.1, cap.1, cor., in *Doctor irrefragabilis Alexandri de Hales ordinis minorum summa theologica*, ed. by Pacific Perantoni, 5 vols (Quarrachi: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1924–48), IV, p. 2. ‘Prima est ut cognitio secundum visum, et ideo debet dici scientia absoluta; secunda, ut cognitio secundum gustum, et ideo debet dici sapientia a sapore affectionis’. References are given below by the original divisions in the text followed by the page number in this edition.

⁸¹ *Summa fratris Alexandri*, ed. by Perantoni, q. 1, cap.1, ad 4 (IV, p. 3).

⁸² *Summa fratris Alexandri*, ed. by Perantoni, q. 1, cap. 4, a. 2, cor (IV, p. 10).

⁸³ *Summa fratris Alexandri*, ed. by Perantoni, q. 1, cap. 4, a. 2, ad 3 (IV, p. 9).

human reason or experiment is without merit.⁸⁴ In response, 'Alexander' uses the distinctions between the different kinds knowledge and certitude. There is the certitude 'according to the speculation of the intellect, which is through the mode of vision', but there is another 'affective' certitude 'which is through the mode of adherence, namely through the will or love'.⁸⁵ So, 'Alexander' concludes, cognition through creatures (in our natural mode of knowing) is more certain in two ways: by sense and by habit acquired through the sense. But cognition from God is more certain in two different ways: by innate and infused habit.⁸⁶

As we can see, the notion of certainty becomes more and more elaborate in an effort to maintain a kind of certitude for faith and theology. The writers of the *Summa* do not express as much fear that science will usurp the place of faith as William of Auvergne, yet they do take care to map out a different path for sacred theology, from assent or belief to understanding rather than vice versa, and a different kind of certainty for its conclusions, affective rather than intellectual, and grounded in action rather than thought.

Conclusion

Aristotle's standards for science, dropped into the landscape of the medieval curriculum, became the standard for certainty and, by the same stroke, *uncertainty* about what fell short of its measure. Like fear and Thomas Hobbes (as Hobbes wrote in his autobiography), certainty and uncertainty are twins, born together. Thus, Aristotle's standards for science when applied to different speculative disciplines result in degrees of uncertainty, rather than what Aristotle wanted to distinguish, truth from seeming truth. We do not find in response to Aristotle's notion of science any full-blown scepticism, but it does bring a heightened interest in the problem of uncertainty and the nature and sources of certainty. For, on the one hand, if in the more generally optimistic and humanistic atmosphere of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, it is less possible to blame ignorance on corrupt human nature, and if, on the other hand, the

⁸⁴ *Summa fratris Alexandri*, ed. by Perantoni, q. 2, M. 3, cap. 4, obj. 1 (IV, p. 34).

⁸⁵ *Summa fratris Alexandri*, ed. by Perantoni, q. 2, M. 3, cap. 4, ad 3 (IV, p. 35): 'Distinguendum est: quod est certitudo secundum speculationem intellectus, quae est per modum visus, et est certitudo secundum sensum affectus, quae est per modum adhaerentiae, voluntatis scilicet vel amoris'.

⁸⁶ *Summa fratris Alexandri*, ed. by Perantoni, q. 2, M. 3, cap. 5 (IV, pp. 35–36).

standard for what counts as knowledge is raised, the gap between what we do know and what we can and should know grows larger.

This heightened interest in the possibility of uncertainty, we have seen, can move in two directions, into a defence of the old disciplines as possessing their own kind of certainty different from that of Aristotelian science, or towards propaganda for the new science as producing certainty and denigration of the old as leaving us in uncertainty. Thus the encounter between Aristotle and the medieval curriculum results in a set of debates that maps out the rift also found in much later conflicts between science and the humanities, what William James called the 'tender-' versus the 'tough-minded' approaches to the world, or C. P. Snow's 'two cultures'. The tough-minded tout the superiority of science because of its objectivity and rationality, while the tender-minded defend the non-scientific disciplines on the basis of the greater subjective fervour and affective adherence they produce. While William of Auvergne and Alexander of Hales attempt to defend faith or sacred doctrine, their arguments bring to mind most readily the romantic defence of poetry as able to hold its own against science even in or especially by virtue of its differences from it. By the same token, the cheerleading for experimental science and mathematics in Averroes and Roger Bacon verges on a kind of scientism, discounting other methods as lacking rigour and certainty. It seems somehow reassuring to know that these battles did not begin in the seventeenth century but that we have a preview of them in the Middle Ages. I have not traced the influence and posterity of these specific thinkers and positions from the early Middle Ages through to the fourteenth century nor, obviously, to modernity. However, this material suggests that when these battles get fully under way in modernity, even though they are about modern rather than Aristotelian science, both sides take up positions in trenches already dug in these early skirmishes over Aristotelian science and its standards for certainty.

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CAN WE TRUST OUR SENSES? FOURTEENTH-CENTURY DEBATES ON SENSORY ILLUSIONS

Dominik Perler

I

It seems quite natural that our knowledge of the material world is grounded in sensory perception. If we were not able to see, hear, smell, taste, or touch things around us, we would have no chance to know *that* they exist and *how* they exist. It is therefore hardly surprising that philosophers in the Aristotelian tradition defended the empiricist thesis that sensory perception provides the foundation for knowledge as well as for other forms of cognition (imagination, memory, etc.). But how firm is this foundation? One can easily refer to cases of sensory illusions that show how our senses can, and in fact sometimes do, lead us astray. For instance, when we see a square tower far in the distance it looks round to us and we are inclined to judge that it is in fact round — an obvious error. Or when we see a straight stick that is partly submerged in water it looks bent to us and we quite spontaneously judge that it is in fact bent — another obvious error. Ancient sceptics in the Pyrrhonian as well as in the Academic tradition pointed out these and many other cases of sensory error, thereby questioning the seemingly innocent assumption that we can trust our senses as a reliable and secure foundation of knowledge. Indispensable and inevitable as the senses may seem, they are not to be trusted.

It is well known that Descartes referred to the cases discussed by ancient sceptics and used them as a starting point for developing a radical thesis: since

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it is always possible for our senses to deceive us, as we repeatedly experience, and since we lack a criterion that enables us to distinguish deceptive cases from veridical ones, we should never trust our senses. We should look for a way 'by which the mind may be led away from the senses' and thereby find another foundation of knowledge — a foundation that is infallible and therefore absolutely secure.¹

Like Descartes, late medieval philosophers were familiar with ancient debates about sensory illusions. They knew them mostly through Cicero's *Academica* and Augustine's *Contra academicos*, two influential sources dealing with academic scepticism that were read along with Aristotelian texts.² In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, written in a first version in 1312–16 and in a revised version in 1316–18, Peter Aureol presented eight cases of sensory illusion for visual perception alone.³ These cases partly stemmed from ancient debates, partly from Arabic discussions among the so-called 'perspectivists'.⁴ Aureol, as well as his readers and critics in the fourteenth century, mentioned them in order to illustrate that the senses lead us astray in various situations. But neither Aureol nor his successors drew the radical consequence that we should mistrust the senses and lead our mind away from them. On the contrary, they all agreed that we need to start with sense perception if we want to acquire knowledge.

Why did they not refer to sensory illusions, which clearly show that the senses *sometimes* deceive us, in order to argue for the radical thesis that the senses could *always* deceive us and that we lack criteria that would enable us to distinguish veridical from non-veridical cases? How did they interpret these illusions? And what significance did they attribute to them in their epistemological project? I intend to discuss these questions by focusing on two case studies, namely the analyses of sensory illusions provided by Walter Chatton and William Ockham. Both authors took these illusions seriously, but both tried to explain them within the framework of a naturalist and reliabilist theory of knowledge, which excluded radical scepticism from the outset. That is why I will not only examine

¹ *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, synopsis, in Descartes, *Oeuvres*, ed. by Adam and Tannery, VII, p. 12. (All translations from Latin are mine.)

² On the reception of academic scepticism, see Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus*. Pyrrhonian scepticism was present thanks to a late thirteenth-century translation of Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, but this translation seems not to have been used. See Wittwer, 'Zur lateinischen Überlieferung von Sextus Empiricus'.

³ See Peter Aureol, *Scriptum super primum sententiarum*, ed. by Buytaert, dist. 3, sect. 14 (I, pp. 696–98).

⁴ On Aureol's sources, see Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham*, pp. 85–100.

their explanations of single examples of illusion, but also the more general assumptions they made when dealing with these examples. Only an analysis of their general framework can show how and why they resisted the temptations of radical scepticism. Moreover, a closer look at their framework will also reveal how they attempted to deal with cases of uncertainty when explaining the possibility of certain knowledge.

It might seem that late medieval discussions about the uncertainty of knowledge had their origin mostly in theological concerns about God's absolute power, not in worries about the reliability of sense perception. Since God is not bound to the natural order, he can always intervene in cognitive processes and create beliefs that have no natural cause. Thus, he could make me believe that there is a square tower in front of me although there is no such thing. Since I cannot distinguish a naturally acquired belief from a supernaturally caused one, I cannot be certain about any belief. Hence, I can never claim to have knowledge. Prominent and influential as this kind of argument was in late medieval debates, it should not be taken to be the only source of inspiration for sceptical discussions.⁵ Fourteenth-century authors clearly saw that we need to tackle sceptical problems even if we put theological hypotheses aside. That is, even if we accept the premise that beliefs normally arise according to a natural order, we need to examine possible misperceptions, sensory illusions, and false beliefs. We need to ask how and why they can arise, and we need to explain why they do not threaten our knowledge claims. It would therefore be inadequate to see the problem of uncertainty as a mere consequence of theological debates. A detailed analysis of perceptual processes in the *natural* order also gave rise to this problem: sensory illusions can always occur, even without there being any divine intervention.⁶

II

In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, Walter Chatton explicitly refers to Peter Aureol whose position he presents and criticizes.⁷ According to Aureol, we do

⁵ I discuss it in detail in Perler, 'Does God Deceive Us?'

⁶ I will occasionally refer to the problem of divine intervention (see notes 21, 38, and 39), but only in so far as it is immediately relevant for a discussion of the problem of sensory illusions.

⁷ He reports the position and a number of examples discussed by Aureol in Walter Chatton, *Reportatio et lectura super sententias*, ed. by Wey, prol., q. 2, art. 2 (pp. 86–87). For a close analysis of Aureol's position, see Denery II, *Seeing and Being Seen*, pp. 117–36; Perler, *Theorien der Intentionalität im Mittelalter*, pp. 274–83.

not immediately see material things and their properties, but special entities with 'apparent' or 'intentional being' (*esse apparens* or *esse intentionale*), which are not produced by nature but by our mind. He argues that cases of sensory illusion nicely illustrate this general fact. Thus, when we are travelling on a boat and see moving trees on the shore, we see, strictly speaking, only apparent trees and not material trees. To be sure, the apparent trees are related to the material ones, because we would not be able to produce apparent trees if we had never been affected by material ones. But the two types of trees are nevertheless distinct. Why? The apparent trees clearly have a property, namely being in movement, while the material trees on the shore lack this property. Similarly, when we detect a stick partly submerged in water, we immediately see an apparent stick that is distinct from the real one. The reason for this distinction, again, is based on the simple fact that the apparent stick has a distinctive property, namely being bent, which the material stick lacks. Sometimes we can even see an apparent thing without there being a material one present. For instance, when we look straight into the sun and then close our eyes, we continue to see a bright, yellow ball. According to Aureol, this shows that we can see an apparent thing even if we are no longer in contact with a corresponding material one, and all the statements we make refer only to the apparent thing.

Chatton judges this position to be utterly wrong. He adduces a number of arguments in order to show that apparent things are nothing but dubious, perfectly superfluous entities. In his first argument he refers to the principle of parsimony.⁸ One should not invoke unnecessary entities, he states, when explaining a phenomenon. To explain visual perception, it is perfectly sufficient to refer to two entities only, namely the material object affecting a person and the act of seeing that arises in this person. There is no need to invoke a third entity that is supposed to provide a bridge between these two entities.

Aureol would hardly be impressed by this argument. In his view, sensory illusions make clear that it is in fact necessary to admit something in addition to the material thing and the act of seeing. For the person on the boat clearly sees a movement, and every movement is the property of an object; but the material trees do not move; therefore there must be another thing that serves as the subject of this property. The necessity of positing a third entity is even more evident in the case of the person who has an afterimage of the sun, because this person sees a bright, yellow ball when the material sun is no longer present.

⁸ See Walter Chatton, *Reportatio et lectura super sententias*, ed. by Wey, p. 87, l. 28–30.

This clearly shows that there must be an apparent being; otherwise this person's act of seeing would have no object at all — *pluralitas est ponenda*.

Quite obviously, Chatton needs to provide a justification for the application of the principle of parsimony. He does so by pointing out that there is a fallacy in Aureol's argument.⁹ Aureol starts by describing an object as a relational thing, i.e., as a thing that is related to a perceiving person, but then turns it into an absolute thing, i.e., a thing that has independent existence. In the logical literature about fallacies, this was called the *fallacia secundum quid et simpliciter*.¹⁰ Chatton illustrates it with an example. If someone were to say 'Homer exists in an opinion, therefore Homer exists', he would first talk about Homer in so far as he is thought about and described by readers of Greek literature, and then falsely conclude that this thought-object exists as a distinct entity. But there is no such entity. All that exists (or once existed) is the real Homer, a person of flesh and blood, and all kinds of descriptions apply to this entity. Strictly speaking, they apply to Homer in so far as he is present under a certain aspect (say, as author of the *Iliad*) to a certain reader. That is why one should not simply say 'Homer exists', but rather 'The real Homer is present to someone as the author of the *Iliad*'. Sensory illusions ought to be explained on the same line. Should someone say that she sees moving trees, bent sticks, or the bright sun, she would not refer to special entities but simply point out that some material things are present to her under a certain aspect. Consequently, all the judgements and descriptions this person would make would apply to material things only. Thus, a statement like 'There are moving trees in front of me' would simply mean 'There are material trees in front of me, and they appear to me as being in movement'. This special appearance depends on the circumstances under which the person is looking at the trees. Should she leave the boat and look at them while standing on the shore, the very same trees would appear to her as being immobile.

This explanatory strategy shows that Chatton justifies the application of the principle of parsimony by pointing out that one and the same object can appear in different ways. Technically speaking, there can be different 'extrinsic denominations' of one and the same thing.¹¹ But denominations and ways of appearing should not be conflated with types of things. All that can appear in

⁹ See Walter Chatton, *Reportatio et lectura super sententias*, ed. by Wey, p. 87, l. 43–45.

¹⁰ It was already mentioned in Aristotle, *De sophisticis elenchis*, 5 (166b36–167a14) and often discussed in logic handbooks, for instance in Peter of Spain, *Tractatus Called Afterwards 'Summule logicales'*, ed. by De Rijk, VII, n. 120 (pp. 157–58).

¹¹ Chatton explicitly uses this terminology in Walter Chatton, *Reportatio et lectura super sententias*, ed. by Wey, p. 87, l. 44.

a perceptual act is a *material* thing. Accepting an apparent thing in addition to the material one would have devastating consequences, as Chatton emphasizes in a further argument.¹² If we assumed that acts of seeing are only directed at apparent things, we could no longer affirm that we are cognitively related to things in the world. Consequently, we could no longer claim that we acquire knowledge of these things. All we could cognize and know about would be apparent things, created by our minds, which only stand as signs of things in the world. This would be true not just of our relation to the material world, but also to the immaterial one. Even with respect to God, the most perfect object we hope to see in the beatific vision, we would have to concede ‘that it is not God who will be the beatific object, but such a fictitious being’.¹³ It would be an open question how and why we could draw an inference from the apparent God to the existence of a real God.

Using modern terminology, one could say that Chatton defends direct realism against representationalism. He endorses the thesis that we *directly* cognize material or immaterial things in the world and no inner *doppelgänger*, even if we happen to give false descriptions of these things. That is why we do not need to draw dubious inferences from internal to external objects. Nor do we need to explain how internal, merely apparent objects can represent external ones. Finally, we do not need to provide special evidence for our certainty about the existence of external things. The simple fact that we directly see them, no matter how many false statements we happen to make about them, shows that we do have immediate certainty. Thus, even someone who falsely affirms that the stick in the water is bent because it looks bent, can be certain that the stick exists. Should no material thing be present, no visual experience and no thought about the object — neither a correct nor an incorrect one — would be possible.

However, Chatton’s conclusion that according to Aureol’s theory ‘no external thing can be cognized or seen, but only a fictitious one that signifies an external one’,¹⁴ proves to be inaccurate if one compares it with Aureol’s own statements. Aureol does not claim that we are out of touch with material things and that we only see apparent things, which may or may not correctly signify

¹² See Walter Chatton, *Reportatio et lectura super sententias*, ed. by Wey, p. 87, ll. 31–36.

¹³ Walter Chatton, *Reportatio et lectura super sententias*, ed. by Wey, p. 87, ll. 35–36: ‘[...] et per consequens Deus non erit obiectum beatificum sed quoddam tale ens fictum’.

¹⁴ This is his final conclusion in Walter Chatton, *Reportatio et lectura super sententias*, ed. by Wey, p. 88, ll. 50–51: ‘Unde ad istam viam videretur sequi quod nulla res extra cognoscitur vel videtur, sed quoddam ens fictum significans rem extra [...]’

material things. He rather holds that real and apparent things *coincide* in a normal situation.¹⁵ Should one look at a straight stick that is lying on a table in a well-illuminated room, one would not have mere access to an apparent stick and one would not need to ask how this ‘fictitious being’ is related to something in the external world. Given favourable perceptual conditions, one could be certain that the apparent stick is immediately grounded in a material one, and that they share many properties. They would then coincide in the sense that they are to a large extent qualitatively identical.¹⁶ However, sensory illusions make clear that the two things can fall apart under special circumstances, and it is precisely this fact that makes these cases interesting. They help us realize that we ought to look carefully at the circumstances under which we have access to an apparent thing and that we should not unreflectively assume that every apparent thing perfectly coincides with a material one. That there is such a coincidence can only be taken for granted when we are certain that normal conditions obtain. So, Aureol’s intention is not to claim that we are somehow imprisoned in an internal world of apparent things and that we can only make guesses about the existence of an external world. He rather wants to point out the weaknesses of a naïve form of direct realism: we should not uncritically assume that the presence of apparent things always tells us how material things really are.

Even if Chatton does not fully capture Aureol’s intention, he is certainly right in pointing out a crucial problem in Aureol’s theory, namely the lack of an immediate cognitive relation to material things. How can we ever be sure that apparent and material things coincide in some (or even most) cases if all we have immediate access to are apparent things? Should we evaluate the perceptual conditions and come to the conclusion that, for instance, the apparent stick perfectly coincides with the material one because we see it in normal light on a table, we would only be entitled to say that we are seeing an *apparent* stick on an *apparent* table in *apparent* light. But how can we be certain that all these apparent things coincide with real ones? We cannot take a neutral standpoint that would enable us to compare apparent and material things. Inevitably, our

¹⁵ Peter Aureol, *Scriptum super primum sententiarum*, ed. by Buytaert, dist. 3, sect. 14 (1, p. 698): ‘Sed tamen non distinguitur imago seu res in esse apparenti a reali, quia simul coincidunt in vera visione [...]’

¹⁶ Of course, they cannot be numerically identical because the apparent is produced by the intellect and therefore numerically distinct from the real thing. Nor can they be entirely qualitatively identical because the apparent thing has some properties (e.g., being in the intellect and therefore immaterial) which the material thing lacks.

immediate access is limited to apparent things. Whether or not all these things, which we enumerate when spelling out the perceptual conditions, are really founded in a material world is beyond our cognitive reach. All we can do is assume or, given a certain coherence of all apparent things, reasonably argue that these things coincide with material ones. But we will never have full certainty.

Given this problem, it is quite understandable why Chatton insists that we directly see material things in the external world. However, his position poses a problem when it comes to cases of deception. Why does the person on the boat see material trees, not some kind of inner *doppelgänger*, as being in movement, even though the trees themselves are not moving? And why does someone who has just closed his eyes still see the material sun if the sun itself is no longer present? Chatton answers these questions by referring to the species theory, which had been widely received in the Latin West since the middle of the thirteenth century (e.g., thanks to Roger Bacon's *De multiplicatione specierum*).¹⁷ According to this theory, special entities, so-called *species in medio*, are transmitted from the external things to the eyes when a perception takes place. The reception of these entities gives rise to the production of further mediating entities in the senses, namely the *species sensibiles*, which make it possible for the external thing to become cognitively present. These entities in turn give rise to the production of still further entities in the intellect, the *species intelligibiles*, which make the production of concepts and judgements about the perceived things possible. Chatton admits all three kinds of species, as Katherine Tachau has shown in detail,¹⁸ and thereby explains not only how a material thing can become a visual object, but also how it can be present in a distorted way. For how various species are produced and how they make a thing cognitively present depends on the perceptual situation. Sometimes these species are produced when the body is in motion; hence they make an object cognitively present as if it were in motion. Sometimes they are so intensive that they remain in the eyes and keep making an object cognitively present even when it is no longer present. Chatton holds:

Therefore, it seems that one should say the following: sometimes it happens that an earlier caused act of seeing can remain for some time while the seen thing disappears, because the intensive species, by which the act of seeing is immediately

¹⁷ On the reception of this theory, see Lindberg, *Roger Bacon's Philosophy of Nature*; Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham*, pp. 3–26. For a concise overview, see Smith, 'Perception'.

¹⁸ See Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham*, pp. 198–202.

caused, remains for some time by virtue of its intensity, while the thing itself disappears. Nevertheless, it can never happen that an act of seeing is either naturally caused or for a long time preserved without the presence of the seen thing, as has been proved.¹⁹

The decisive point is that a species — be it in the medium, in the senses or in the intellect — never arises *ex nihilo*. In normal situations it is caused by an external thing that affects a person. And given this external cause, the species makes precisely this thing cognitively present. Chatton defends what is nowadays sometimes called a ‘causal theory of perception’: the external cause of a perceptual act is the cognitive object of that act. This theory enables him to explain cases of deception. For it can happen that the effect brought about by an external cause is still present, namely by means of a species that somehow reinforces the effect, while the cause has already disappeared. In this special case, the perceptual act is directed at its first cause. This is why someone can still see the sun when the sun itself is no longer present — the more intensive the species is, the longer an act is directed at the sun. So, one does not need to posit an apparent sun that would somehow replace the external sun as cognitive object. All one needs to explain is how and why the sun can have a lasting effect. By referring to species one provides exactly this explanation. Moreover, it is also clear what kind of error occurs in the person who thinks that the sun is still present in the heavens. Instead of saying ‘The sun *was* present to me and had a lasting effect on me’, she judges ‘The sun *is* still present to me’. This means, of course, that she is not falling prey to a sensory deception, but to an intellectual one: the intellect does not take into account that the sun is only present because of the intensive species, thus falsely interpreting the visual information it receives from the senses.

The case of the moving trees is explained in a similar way. Since the eyes move along with the entire body on the boat, the person receives a series of species that present the trees at different locations. This makes the person produce the false judgement: ‘The trees are moving’. Here, again, she is not referring to some spooky apparent thing. Her only cognitive object is the external cause, i.e., the material trees. But since the trees are the source of many species

¹⁹ Walter Chatton, *Reportatio et lectura super sententias*, ed. by Wey, p. 91, ll. 150–55: ‘Ideo videtur dicendum quoad istud quod licet aliquando visio prius causata nata sit manere per aliquod tempus re visa recedente, eo quod species intensa per quam immediate visio causatur, remanet per aliquod tempus, re ipsa recedente, propter intensionem speciei, tamen numquam nata est visio aliqua naturaliter causari vel diu conservari sine praesentia rei visae, sicut probatum est’.

that indicate various locations, there are, strictly speaking, many acts of seeing directed at the trees. And there is, again, no sensory deception, but an intellectual one. The intellect does not realize that there are many species and many acts of seeing directed at many locations. Should it investigate how these acts were caused, it could easily correct the false judgement.

At this point one could raise an objection against Chatton's appeal to species. Does he not commit himself to a third entity (or even a series of entities), posited in addition to the external thing and the act of seeing, despite his claim that no superfluous entities should be admitted? And does he not compromise direct realism by saying that external things are only cognitively present by means of species? It seems as if he were suggesting, just like Aureol, that we only have immediate access to inner entities that somehow refer to external things by which they are caused.

This objection misses the point. Chatton does indeed posit additional entities when he talks about species, but they are only *causal* entities posited between the external thing and the act of seeing — entities that somehow establish a causal chain between them. No matter how many causal entities are admitted, it is only the external thing as the original cause that is the cognitive object. Technically speaking, the species are only the *medium quo* and never the *terminus ad quem* of an act of seeing. Therefore, Chatton does not give up direct realism. Nor does he violate the principle of parsimony, because this principle only rejects unnecessary entities. But species are necessary, because an external object could never have an effect — much less a lasting effect — on a person and consequently never become cognitively present if there were no causal intermediaries. A modern analogy may illustrate this point. Suppose a neuroscientist were saying that the retina receives an input when it is affected by light rays, and that this input gives rise to a number of neural states, which in turn give rise to a visual awareness of an external thing. Would she refer to unnecessary entities when talking about neural states? Certainly not, because it is only by means of these states that the external thing becomes cognitively present. In a similar way, Chatton does not refer to unnecessary entities when he talks about species, because it is only by means of these entities (in the medium, in the senses and in the intellect) that an external thing becomes cognitively present.

But why is Chatton so certain that there is in fact an external, natural cause for an act of seeing? Could it not be that there is no such cause? For instance, could it not be that it is not the sun but God who causes an act of seeing a bright, yellow ball? Given God's absolute, unrestricted power, he can do everything as long as there is no violation of the principle of non-contradiction, and he certainly does not violate this principle when he brings about an act of see-

ing without the support of an external cause. So, why could it not be that God causes this act and that he does it so perfectly that one cannot tell the difference between divine and natural causation? Are we then not compelled to admit what is nowadays called a ‘disjunctivist position’, namely that the sun *or* God is our object and that we cannot tell what exactly it is?²⁰

Chatton acknowledges this problem. Like all his contemporaries, he admits that God could intervene at any time and act without any natural cause or even in opposition to a natural cause.²¹ This possibility can never be excluded. Therefore, an ‘invincible error’ can never be completely avoided, as Chatton concedes. But he hastens to add:

It is nevertheless a fact that we can have such a certitude, namely that we cannot be led to an invincible error by natural causes.²²

If we confine ourselves to perceptual acts that have *natural* causes, we can be certain that we are in cognitive contact with things in the world, even if we sometimes happen to make false judgements about them. Admittedly, we have no absolute certainty about the natural character of the cause at stake, because divine intervention can never be excluded. Nevertheless, our certitude is solid enough to serve as a foundation for knowledge about the material world. One generation after Chatton, the Parisian author Peter of Ailly called this certainty ‘conditional evidence’ (*evidentia condicionata*).²³ It is conditional because we should always make the following cautious statement: *if* God does not intervene, *then* we can be certain that we have perception and hence also knowledge of things in the external world. This kind of certainty is all we need and all we can strive for in our daily life as well as in natural science.

²⁰ See Haddock and Macpherson, eds, *Disjunctivism*.

²¹ Using his absolute power, God could ignore all the natural laws and bring about everything as long as it is not self-contradictory. Chatton explicitly endorses this thesis in Walter Chatton, *Reportatio et lectura super sententias*, ed. by Wey, prol., q. 2, art. 6 (p. 131, ll. 66–67). On the crucial distinction between absolute and ordained power, see Courtenay, *Capacity and Volition*.

²² Walter Chatton, *Reportatio et lectura super sententias*, ed. by Wey, p. 92, ll. 182–83: ‘Tamen cum hoc stat quod habeamus talem certitudinem quod per causas naturales non possemus sic poni in errore invincibili’.

²³ See Peter of Ailly, *Quaestiones super libros sententiarum*, fol. dv (pagination without numbering). For a detailed analysis, see Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit*, pp. 179–91.

Chatton does not have the slightest doubt that this is sufficient. He even points out that we cannot but rely on this certainty if we want to build up a corpus of knowledge:

[...] otherwise all our certitude would perish, because we have the highest certitude of sensible things on the basis of the experience of our sensations, through which sensible things become present to us.²⁴

This statement has the structure of a *reductio* argument. If we did not assume that sense perception yields certain knowledge, we would have to concede that we do not have the slightest idea how we can ever acquire certain knowledge. Hence, we would have to give up all knowledge claims. But this would be utterly absurd, because then we would also have to give up scientific investigations, which clearly presuppose that knowledge is possible. Worse, we would have to give up simple knowledge claims in daily life because suddenly everything would be open to doubt. We could no longer even have confidence in such a basic claim as ‘I know that the stick is in the water because I see it’. To avoid this absurdity, we ought to operate with the reasonable assumptions (a) that natural conditions prevail and (b) that under these conditions sense perception gives rise to a solid body of knowledge. The mere hypothesis that God could intervene does not destroy the persuasiveness of this assumption.

But why are we entitled to assume that it is indeed sense perception that provides a foundation for certain knowledge? Why should we not appeal to another foundation, say to divine illumination or to innate principles?²⁵ Because we have *reliable* cognitive capacities, namely senses and intellect, which are activated by external things that affect us. This causal relation gives rise to the production of species, which make external things cognitively present. Under normal circumstances, they make them correctly present. Chatton does not cast any doubt on the fact that we can trust our cognitive capacities and that species are normally produced in a reliable way. Cases of sensory illusion

²⁴ Walter Chatton, *Reportatio et lectura super sententias*, ed. by Wey, p. 89, ll. 91–93: ‘[...] aliter periret omnis nostra certitudo, quia maxima certitudo nostra de sensibilibus contingit nobis per hoc quod experimur nostras sensationes, per quas sensibilia nobis apparent praesentia.’

²⁵ In the context of late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century discussions, it was not extravagant to look for another foundation. A number of authors in the Augustinian tradition, among them Henry of Ghent, did in fact argue that sense perception will never tell us how things really are, i.e., what kind of essence they have. It is only divine illumination that will provide us with this knowledge. On this line of argument, see Marrone, *The Light of Thy Countenance*; Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit*, pp. 37–63.

do not weaken this assumption but rather confirm it because they are nothing but exceptional cases, which only make sense against the background of a large number of normal cases. Thus, the case of the trees that seem to be moving is clearly an exceptional case (one simply needs to leave the boat in order to recognize that), and one can even point out the reason for its being an exception (since various species in the eyes point at various locations of the trees, they present them as if they were moving). To identify exceptional cases is only possible because there are normal cases that serve, as it were, as the standard for evaluation. According to Chatton, we should neither doubt that there are normal cases, nor should we be sceptical about our capacity to pick out these cases. Consequently, the fact that we are *sometimes* led to make false judgements about external things should not make us worry that we could *always* make false judgements.

But what about the criterion problem? Do we not need a neutral criterion that enables us to distinguish the occasional non-veridical cases from the large number of veridical cases? Chatton never discusses this problem. He does not see any need to indicate a criterion that we could use to test all the cases of perception. Why not? Given his theoretical framework, there is no need to test each and every case. Since we have reliable cognitive capacities, which function correctly under normal conditions, the cognitions these capacities bring about are mostly veridical. We can trust them without checking every case. A modern example may help to illustrate this point. Suppose that you have just received a new computer that enables you to write texts, to receive emails, to make calculations, etc. Now you happily use this computer without thinking about its reliability. But then a friend, who is quite astonished about your naïve trust in the computer, asks you: 'Why do you not check all the texts and calculations the computer provides? What if many or at least some of them are defective? Should you therefore not take a neutral stance and test each and every output you get from the computer?'. The most natural reaction would be: 'Admittedly, some outputs may be defective because there may be some special circumstances in which the computer does not function properly. But in principle, it works perfectly because it is designed to provide correct texts and calculations. The reliability is, as it were, built into its hardware and software. That is why I have no reason to be suspicious. I will check it only when I am presented with puzzling data that do not fit into the rest'. It is on this line that we can understand Chatton's silence about a test for all our cognitions. On his view, our cognitive capacities are designed to bring about correct cognitions. That is why it would be inappropriate to distrust them and to assume that they could deceive us at each and every moment. Tests and eventual revisions are only necessary when

we are presented with puzzling or incoherent cases. Only then does it make sense to question their correctness, to compare them to other cases and eventually to discard them. But there is no need to put all of our cognitions on trial.

III

Like Walter Chatton, William Ockham extensively discusses Peter Aureol's position, and just like Chatton he decidedly rejects it. To posit apparent things that are supposed to be immediate objects of our acts of seeing is not only superfluous but completely erroneous. Should one admit such entities, one would inevitably be led to the absurd position that we only have immediate access to inner objects, not to material things in the external world. To avoid this absurdity, Ockham unmistakably holds:

Therefore I say, first, that in no intuitive cognition, neither in a sensory nor in an intuitive one, does one come up with a thing with some kind of being, which would be placed between the [external] thing and the act of cognizing. Instead, I claim that the [external] thing is immediately seen or apprehended, without there being anything between it and the act.²⁶

In support of this thesis, Ockham refers both to ontological problems (the status of the 'apparent being' is rather unclear when compared to the status of all the entities belonging to one of the Aristotelian categories) and to epistemological ones (no direct knowledge of material things would be possible).

In addition to the arguments adduced by Chatton, Ockham presents the following one that is meant to show that Aureol's position is not only unattractive, but in the end no help at all in discussions concerned with perception. Suppose one were to agree that there are indeed apparent things and that these things are the only ones to which we have immediate access in our acts of seeing. Would this solve the problem of perception? Not at all! A satisfactory solution ought to provide an answer to the basic question of how we can perceive a material thing. Should we now say that we can do so only because we perceive an apparent thing that signifies an external thing, one could immediately ask: but how can we perceive the apparent thing? Two responses are possible.

²⁶ William Ockham, *Ordinatio*, I, dist. 27, q. 3 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, IV, p. 241): 'Unde dico primo quod in nulla notitia intuitiva, nec sensitiva nec intellectiva, constituitur res in quocumque esse quod sit aliquod medium inter rem et actum cognoscendi. Sed dico quod ipsa res immediate, sine omni medio inter ipsam et actum, videtur vel apprehenditur'.

(1) One could answer this question like the first one, saying that we can do so only because we perceive another apparent thing that signifies the first apparent thing that signifies a material thing. This answer would inevitably lead to an infinite regress; for every apparent thing one would require a further apparent thing. (2) To avoid this consequence, one could reply that the apparent thing is immediately present and can therefore immediately be perceived. But why then should one not give the same answer with respect to the material thing? If immediate presence is possible, we can as well assume that the material thing is immediately present and that it can therefore immediately be perceived.²⁷

Given these two equally unattractive options, it is not surprising that Ockham analyses cases of sensory illusion along the same line as Chatton. One would commit a fallacy if one were to say 'Something appears to be F; therefore an apparent thing exists and this special thing has the property F'. All that exists (or in Ockham's logical terminology: all a subject term in a perceptual statement stands for) is a material thing, and it is precisely this thing that appears to be F.²⁸ If one falsely judges that the material thing itself has F, one does so only because one neglects the special conditions under which this thing appears. This means, of course, that one commits an intellectual error: one neglects to distinguish carefully between the properties the material thing only appears to have and those it really has. Such an error is always possible, Ockham concedes, because the human intellect, unlike the divine one, is far from being infallible. Nevertheless, it functions correctly under normal conditions. And when it happens to function incorrectly in special situations, it is able to evaluate and eventually correct its own errors.

But what accounts for intellectual error? Ockham parts ways with Chatton with his answer to this question. When appealing to the principle of parsimony, Ockham does not even admit causal intermediary entities — neither *species in medio*, nor sensible species, nor intelligible species.²⁹ On his view, an act of see-

²⁷ See William Ockham, *Ordinatio*, I, dist. 27, q. 3 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, iv, p. 240).

²⁸ See William Ockham, *Ordinatio*, I, dist. 27, q. 3 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, iv, p. 241).

²⁹ William Ockham, *Reportatio*, II, q. 12–13 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, v, p. 268): '[...] ad cognitionem intuitivam habendam non oportet aliquid ponere praeter intellectum et rem cognitam, et nullam speciem penitus. Hoc probatur, quia frustra fit per plura quod potest fieri per pauciora. Sed per intellectum et rem visam, sine omni specie, potest fieri cognitio intuitiva, ergo etc.' On the rejection of *species in medio*, see *Reportatio*, III, q. 2 (vi, pp. 59–64). For an analysis of his arguments against species, see Perler, *Theorien der Intentionalität im Mittelalter*, pp. 322–42.

ing is triggered by the simple fact that a material thing acts upon the external senses and literally impresses something (Ockham calls it a *qualitas impressa*), thus bringing about a physical change.³⁰ This change gives rise to a sensory state in which the external thing becomes present, and this state in turn gives rise to an intellectual judgement, which is nothing but a mental sentence composed of mental terms. Thus, as soon as the eyes are affected by the trees, they receive an input that gives rise to a visual awareness of the trees, and this state immediately triggers the intellectual judgement ‘The trees are moving’. So, there is something in the intellect, but nothing more than this judgement, as Ockham emphasizes:

Nevertheless, the sentence ‘The trees are moving’ is objectively in the intellect, and it is indeed true that the intellect can form sentences as well as give its assent to or dissent from them [...]³¹

The important point is that the intellect can come up with this sentence despite the fact that no species has been produced. But why does it produce the sentence ‘The trees are moving’, which is obviously wrong? Ockham provides a strictly naturalist explanation: given the movement of the eyes on the boat, there are impressions in different parts of the eyes, and these impressions are equivalent to those that would arise if the trees were really moving. These impressions give rise to ‘equivalent acts of apprehension’ (*apprehensiones aequivalentes*) and therefore also to sentences that are equivalent to those that would be formed if the trees were really moving.³² For Ockham, intellectual acts of apprehension are nothing but acts of forming mental terms and combining them in affirmative or negative sentences. To put it in a nutshell, a person standing on a boat makes judgements about the trees in the same way she would if the trees were really moving, since the causal input inevitably leads to this judgement. How could this person correct her judgement? She could simply evaluate the perceptual conditions and eventually find out how she came to have the ‘equivalent acts of apprehension’. Should she leave the boat, she would immediately have another input and consequently produce another judgement.

³⁰ See William Ockham, *Reportatio*, III, q. 3 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, VI, p. 108).

³¹ William Ockham, *Ordinatio*, I, dist. 27, q. 3 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, IV, p. 244): ‘Tamen ista propositio “arbores moventur” est obiective in intellectu, et bene verum est quod intellectus potest formare propositiones et eis assentire vel dissentire [...]’.

³² See William Ockham, *Ordinatio*, I, dist. 27, q. 3 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, IV, p. 244).

Two points are noteworthy about Ockham's explanatory strategy. First, it is striking that he does not only reject sensible and intelligible species, but also *species in medio* that would enable a person to be in contact with an external thing. He takes it to be evident that an 'impressed quality' alone suffices to establish a contact. But how can such a quality be impressed if the external thing does not immediately touch or otherwise affect the perceptual organ? How, for instance, can the trees that are ten metres away from the person on the boat impress anything on her eyes? Does Ockham's rejection of all intermediary entities not lead to the strange thesis that a material thing can somehow act at a distance and miraculously bring about a physical change, which will then lead to perceptual acts? Given his radically parsimonious explanation, it is not surprising that later authors criticized it and claimed that at least some causal intermediaries are necessary.³³ If one rejects all intermediaries, one can hardly explain how there can be a causal relation at all.

Second, Ockham takes the intellect to be some kind of semantic machine that immediately produces mental terms and sentences as soon as a physical change in the senses occurs. The intellect is equipped with a natural capacity to produce mental sentences, no matter which spoken language a person has learned. Ockham even claims that the production of these sentences, which together form a mental language, is a prerequisite for the production of spoken and written sentences: should there be no fundamental mental sentences, sentences uttered in English, Latin or some other language would not signify anything.³⁴ Ockham has no doubt that the intellect is a *reliable* semantic machine that produces correct sentences in most situations. Mistakes that eventually occur do not have their origin in a malfunction of the semantic machine (given certain impressed qualities, appropriate terms and sentences automatically arise), but in a lack of volitional control: the will neglects to evaluate the sentences carefully, giving its assent too hastily.³⁵ Thus, the person on the boat does

³³ Ockham explicitly defends the thesis that action at a distance is possible in *Reportatio*, III, q. 2 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, VI, pp. 47–58); for a detailed analysis, see Pasnau, *Theories of Cognition in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 162–81. On the critique expressed by Crathorn and other fourteenth-century authors, see Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham*, pp. 255–74.

³⁴ See William Ockham, *Summa Logicae*, I, 1 (*Opera philosophica*, ed. by Gál and others, I, p. 8). For a detailed analysis, see Lenz, *Wilhelm von Ockhams Thesen zur Sprachlichkeit des Denkens*; for a concise presentation, see Panaccio, 'Semantics and Mental Language'.

³⁵ It is therefore the will and not the intellect that is responsible for the production of a judgement. William Ockham, *Quaestiones variae*, q. 5 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others,

not ask how and why the sentence ‘The trees are moving’ was produced — she uncritically assents to it. Should she evaluate the situation, she would find out that this is a sentence that is only equivalent to the one that would have been produced if the trees had really been moving. Consequently, she would not give her assent. It is therefore quite possible to correct a false judgement by re-evaluating the causal processes and by withholding one’s assent.

Would a sceptic be convinced by this explanation? Hardly so. Most probably, she would respond that Ockham simply takes for granted that the intellect is a reliable semantic machine, producing correct sentences under normal conditions. But how can Ockham be so certain that ‘impressed qualities’ give rise to sentences that are correct under normal circumstances? And how can he be so confident that the will can withhold its assent if it turns out that a sentence is false? Who knows, perhaps the intellect is a semantic machine that randomly produces sentences, some of which are correct and some are not. Perhaps the intellect is not even capable of distinguishing correct from false sentences — it simply responds to sensory inputs without being able to evaluate the conditions under which it receives these inputs.

Ockham does not enter into a discussion of these problems. He rather presupposes that we are all equipped with well-functioning cognitive capacities and that we are able, at least in principle, to use them in order to distinguish exceptional cases, which occasionally mislead us, from normal cases. His entire explanation of cognitive processes relies on three fundamental assumptions: (a) thanks to our sensory and intellectual soul, we all have capacities that enable us to have states of sensory and intellectual cognition; (b) in normal cases, these states are correctly produced and well-coordinated so that a sensory cognition indicating the presence of a thing gives rise to a correct intellectual cognition (i.e., a mental sentence) about that thing; (c) our cognitive capacities may be dysfunctional under special circumstances, but they can be trusted under normal circumstances. Using modern terminology, one could say that Ockham is committed to *reliabilism*: we have reliable cognitive capacities

VIII, p. 170): ‘Ideo dico quod causa quare plus formatur propositio vera quam falsa, affirmativa quam negativa, est voluntas quia voluntas vult unam formare et aliam non’. To avoid misunderstandings, one should note that this position does not commit Ockham to some form of doxastic voluntarism. That is, he does not assume that the will always freely decides what kind of judgement it wants to produce. Under normal circumstances, the act of the will rather immediately follows intellectual acts; see *Reportatio*, II, q. 20 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, v, pp. 441–42). However, the will *can* withhold its assent and is under no obligation to accept every sentence.

that, in principle, yield reliable cognitions and hence reliable mental sentences about external things.³⁶ Ockham even goes so far as to claim that these sentences must ultimately be caused by external things, at least in a natural situation.³⁷ He concedes that the possibility of divine intervention cannot be excluded, but like Chatton he does not see any threat in this possibility.³⁸ God's possible intervention in *some* cases does not cast doubt on the fact that in *most* cases our cognitions are naturally produced and that they correctly inform us about material things. Should God tamper with cognitive processes, he would establish a special causal relation with our intellect. This would not affect the naturally established causal relations; it would neither prevent them from arising nor annihilate their general reliability.³⁹

But even if one puts the special case of divine intervention aside, it seems that Ockham is far too optimistic about our cognitive capacities. Why is he so certain that we are able to identify exceptional cases? We could only detect false sentences and distinguish them from correct ones if we had criteria that would allow us to evaluate all cases from a neutral point of view. But how can we ever gain such a point of view if we cannot escape particular perceptual situations? Thus, we can look at the trees while on the boat, on the shore or in some other place, but we can never observe them from a *neutral* point of view. So, how can

³⁶ To be precise, Ockham defends what is nowadays called 'process-reliabilism': the very functioning of cognitive capacities guarantees that their output, namely judgements about material things, is mostly correct. Of course, reliability is a matter of degree. There can be more or less reliable processes in different human beings under different circumstances, but there is a minimal reliability built into every cognitive faculty and hence also into every cognitive process. On 'reliability' as a technical term, see Alston, *The Reliability of Sense Perception*, pp. 8–11.

³⁷ See William Ockham, *Quodl.*, VI, q. 6 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, IX, p. 606).

³⁸ In the early *Ordinatio*, prol., q. 1 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, I, p. 39) he unmistakably holds that divine intervention gives rise to *correct* intuitive intuitions of non-existing things. For instance, if God destroys a star in the heavens but preserves an act of seeing this star in my intellect, I will produce the correct judgement that the star does *not* exist. Divine intervention should therefore not be conflated with divine deception.

³⁹ Note that Ockham does not provide a psychological criterion that would enable us to distinguish supernaturally caused cognitions from naturally caused ones. That is why he does not rule out the possibility that we could be deceived. The important point is, however, that the mere possibility does not suffice to cast doubt on all cognitions, because God does not destroy or manipulate natural processes that yield correct cognitions. Consequently, the reliability of a large number of cognitions is not in jeopardy. See on this point, Panaccio and Piché, 'Ockham's Reliabilism', especially p. 112.

we be certain that being on the shore is the right perspective and that we can correct the false sentence ‘The trees are moving’ by appealing to the correct sentence we form when standing on the shore? Perhaps God could do so because he is the only being that has a neutral point of view. As human beings, we are inevitably bound to situational perceptions and hence to situational sentences. All we can do is compare the numerous perceptions we have in various situations.

As is well-known, this problem was extensively discussed by ancient sceptics, especially by those in the Pyrrhonian tradition who pointed out that we can only come up with a list of conflicting sentences without being able to decide which ones are correct; we therefore should withhold our judgement.⁴⁰ Ockham never discusses this problem. Why not? Simply because he was not familiar with Pyrrhonian sources? Probably not. There is a deeper reason that is intimately linked to his reliabilism. It makes sense to question all cognitions and hence all mental sentences only if one has no trust in the cognitive capacities. If, however, one starts with the assumption that these capacities are in principle reliable and that they normally provide correct cognitions, one does not need to look for a neutral point of view. It will then suffice to compare conflicting cognitions and to sort out those that do not cohere with all the other ones. A modern example may illustrate this point.

Suppose that you are searching for a street in a city that is unfamiliar to you, and that you are using a map in order to find this street. Now someone approaches you and asks: why do you trust this map? Could it not be that it is utterly misleading? Do you not first need to establish the basic fact that this map is reliable? In order to do so, you need to compare various maps and evaluate them from a neutral point of view. Unfortunately, you cannot do so, because there is no such view. Every view you choose, no matter how many maps you compile, is the view of some cartographer who is limited in his perspective. So, you can never trust a map — neither this one, nor any other that you can find. That is why you should relinquish your naïve idea that you can follow a map in order to find a street. No guide is to be trusted.

Would you be convinced by this intervention? I do not think so. In fact, you should not be convinced, because it is too demanding. The fact that you cannot check the map from a neutral point of view and that you cannot be sure that it is absolutely reliable, should not make you think that it is completely unreliable. As long as it is detailed enough and indicates most streets the way

⁴⁰ See Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Scepticism*, trans. by Annas and Barnes, I, n. 112–17 (pp. 29–31).

they turn out to be, it is reliable enough and can be trusted. Even if it should prove to have some mistakes you could still use it, because the few errors could be corrected against the background of many correct indications.

Ockham makes a similar statement with respect to our cognitive capacities. Even if we can never test their reliability from a neutral (or God's eye) point of view, and even if it turns out that they sometimes provide misleading sensory and intellectual cognitions, as cases of sensory illusion make clear, we should not mistrust them. They are reliable enough to provide correct cognitions in *most* cases, and the few exceptions can be sorted out. For if we find out that certain cognitions only arise under special circumstances, and that they do not cohere with most other cognitions, we can be quite confident that they should be rejected. They are like mistakes on the map that can be identified and eventually corrected.

Ockham explicitly acknowledges that we sometimes make mistakes, which shows that our cognitive capacities do not work successfully in each and every situation:

But the following should be noted: Because of the imperfection of an intuitive cognition (namely because it is very imperfect and obscure, or because of some impediments on the side of the object, or because of some other impediments), it can sometimes happen that no contingent truths or very few truths about an intuitively known thing can be known.⁴¹

Cases of sensory illusion are precisely 'imperfections' that can and sometimes do happen because of special 'impediments' (e.g., the position of the stick in the water or the movement of the person looking at the trees). But they should not make us worry about the general reliability of our cognitive capacities. Nor should they make us think that we need to find a guarantee for this reliability. We should rather start with the assumption that reliability is somehow built into our cognitive capacities and then spell out all the 'impediments' that prevent the capacities from producing cognitions that provide correct information about facts in the world.

⁴¹ William Ockham, *Ordinatio*, I, prol., q. 1 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, I, p. 33): 'Est tamen advertendum quod aliquando propter imperfectionem notitiae intuitivae, quia scilicet est valde imperfecta et obscura, vel propter aliqua impedimenta ex parte obiecti, vel propter aliqua alia impedimenta, potest contingere quod vel nullae vel paucae veritates contingentes de re sic intuitive cognitioni possunt cognosci'.

IV

I hope it has become clear that Chatton and Ockham paid close attention to cases of sensory illusion, but that they did not refer to them in order to argue for the radically sceptical thesis that the senses could always mislead us and that we should therefore mistrust them. Why not? First of all, one should note that these authors were not primarily interested in a sceptical discussion that radically questions the possibility of knowledge. Nor did they have the methodological motivation that was later driving Descartes, namely to shake the empirical foundation of knowledge by adducing cases of illusion. Following the Aristotelian tradition, Chatton and Ockham took it for granted that knowledge should have an empirical foundation. They had a clearly defined *ontological* interest in cases of sensory illusion. Citing them in a dialectical dispute, they intended to show that a certain theory of perception, namely Aureol's theory of 'apparent things', has a devastating consequence: it leads to a proliferation of unnecessary entities. To avoid this consequence, one should give up the entire theory and choose another that rejects intermediary cognitive objects between perceivers and material things. An ontologically parsimonious theory has the further advantage that it avoids representationalism by emphasizing that we have direct perception and hence also direct knowledge of material things. Cases of sensory illusion are, as it were, extreme cases that make this point clear. If one successfully shows that even in these cases our perceptual acts are directed at nothing but material things, one can convincingly argue that strange 'apparent things' are unnecessarily and erroneously posited. So, the main intention was not to show *that* we can have cognitive access to material things and hence knowledge of them, but *how* we can have knowledge of material things and *how* we can explain this knowledge within the framework of an ontologically parsimonious theory.

Moreover, an analysis of cases of illusion reveals that one cannot have a consistent conception of illusion unless one accepts that perceptions are very often correct and trustworthy. The very notion of an illusion, i.e., of a non-veridical case of perception, only makes sense against the background of the hypothesis that there are many veridical cases. That is why it would be confusing to assume that all of our perceptions could be mere illusions. If all of them could turn out to be non-veridical, we would lack a contrast between veridical and non-veridical cases. To preserve this contrast, we need to assume that there are indeed some (or even many) veridical cases. Peter Aureol, who closely examined cases of non-veridical perception, clearly saw this point. After presenting eight cases of sensory illusion, he hastened to add that there are of course cases of 'true

vision' and that apparent and real things coincide in these cases: talk about illusions only makes sense against the background of non-illusionary cases.⁴² While rejecting Aureol's postulation of 'apparent things', Walter Chatton and William Ockham also emphasized that there are many cases of true vision and that these cases are the standard for exceptional cases. They did not dispute that our cognitive capacities yield correct perceptions under normal circumstances. What was at stake, rather, was the question of how the perceptual processes in the standard cases ought to be explained.

But why did Aureol, Chatton, and Ockham not question the presuppositions of their own theories? Why did they assume that, in principle, our cognitive access to material things is reliable so that we are able to produce correct perceptions and consequently also correct judgements? And why did they further assume that we are capable of spotting false judgements and correcting them? An answer to these questions leads to a second important point, namely the theoretical framework of their discussions.

Both authors were committed to particular aspects of some form of *naturalism*. They both assumed (a) that perceptions are nothing but the product of natural causal processes, and (b) that these processes occur because both external things and human beings are hylomorphic entities that are naturally related to each other. As with all causal processes, there can be dysfunction and malfunction in some cases. But given the general validity of the principle *natura nihil facit frustra*, these can only be exceptional cases: nothing is done in vain, and nothing happens outside the natural order that assigns a specific place and function to each process (with the exception of cases of divine intervention). The function of perceptual processes is precisely to establish a cognitive contact with material things and to provide the foundation for knowledge of these things. It would be erroneous to think that perceptual processes arbitrarily produce cognitions which may or may not adequately present external things, and that the intellect arbitrarily produces true and false judgements. Ockham explicitly stated that 'what leads the intellect to an error should not be posited within the intellect'.⁴³ The intellect is a faculty designed to produce true judgements.

But why is that so? To answer this fundamental question, Chatton and Ockham partly appealed to theological reasons (God is a rational creator who

⁴² See Peter Aureol, *Scriptum super primum sententiarum*, ed. by Buytaert, dist. 3, sect. 14 (I, p. 698) (quoted in note 15).

⁴³ William Ockham, *Reportatio*, II, q. 12–13 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, v, p. 281): 'Item, illud quod ponit intellectum in errore non debet poni in intellectu [...]'

produced a world in which natural causal processes are well-ordered), and also partly to philosophical reasons.⁴⁴ One philosophical reason can be detected in their commitment to *natural teleology*. They took natural things to be hylo-morphic compounds that, thanks to their specific form, act for the purpose of reaching some end and are built in such a way that they reach this end under favourable circumstances. This is most evident in Ockham who, following Aristotle, claimed that it is the form that fixes an end and that this end will be reached even if it is not cognized by the acting thing.⁴⁵ He illustrates this with the example of brute animals that are somehow driven to strive for certain ends without thinking about or consciously choosing them. Thus, a bird is naturally driven to build a nest at a certain moment in its development, and it successfully achieves this end under normal circumstances, as it has a number of capacities that naturally bring about exactly the actions necessary for reaching that end. Given its substantial form (or even a plurality of forms), it is, as it were, programmed to act for the purpose of reaching that end. Similarly, human beings also act for an end. Of course, they are more sophisticated than brute animals. As they have intellectual capacities, they normally choose a specific purpose and perform actions in light of what they know will help them reach their goal. Nevertheless, human beings also belong to the realm of natural things and are therefore also equipped with capacities that bring about precisely those actions that are required for reaching a certain end. Ockham explicitly stated that what a natural agent does for the most part is something it is 'naturally apt to do' (*natum est agere*).⁴⁶ It therefore hardly makes sense to ask whether or not an agent is capable of performing a number of actions that enable it to reach an end — it is part of its natural design to have this capacity. Since cognitive capacities are also natural ones, human beings are, as it were, programmed to

⁴⁴ Of course, Ockham conceded that God could create alternative worlds, and using his absolute power he could at every moment intervene in this world. But even if he created other worlds, God would produce worlds that are governed by natural laws and therefore display an order. And if he intervened in this world, he would not destroy the natural order but only produce exceptional events that deviate from this order. Ockham's God is omnipotent but not irrational, i.e., he does not suspend all kinds of order and arbitrarily produce single events. For a detailed analysis that convincingly defends Ockham against the charge of 'theologism', see Adams, *William Ockham*, II, pp. 1233–55.

⁴⁵ See William Ockham, *Expositio in libros Physicorum*, II, cap. 12 (*Opera philosophica*, ed. by Gál and others, IV, p. 379).

⁴⁶ See William Ockham, *Expositio in libros Physicorum*, II, cap. 12 (*Opera philosophica*, ed. by Gál and others, IV, p. 376). For a detailed analysis of this passage, see Adams, 'Ockham on Final Causality' (especially pp. 24–25).

reach a certain cognitive end, i.e., the acquisition of knowledge. The existence and the adequate use of these capacities is part of their natural design.

There is another philosophical reason that motivated Chatton and Ockham to assume the general reliability of human perception. They both made use of the Aristotelian theory of the soul according to which the soul has many well-ordered faculties. One would give up the unity of all these faculties if one were to assume that sensory and intellectual faculties act in an uncontrolled or even isolated way, sometimes bringing about correct cognitions and sometimes incorrect ones. Given that the intellect, the highest faculty, is well coordinated with the lower sensory faculties, they must fit together and contribute to a cognitive process that leads, at least in principle, to correct cognitions. Ockham emphasized this point when he first claimed, contrary to Aristotle, that intellect and senses belong to really distinct souls, but then hastened to add that they nevertheless form a 'unity per se' and that a human being is 'one complete being' in which all the faculties work together to fulfil a cognitive function.⁴⁷

Given this framework, namely an appeal to natural teleology and to the conception of a well-functioning soul, it becomes clear that there were strict limits to the cogency of sceptical thoughts in the fourteenth century. Radical scepticism that would cast doubt on *every* cognitive act and on *every* instance of knowledge was inconceivable as long as this framework was accepted. It was a later attack on basic metaphysical assumptions that opened the sluices, as it were, for the flood of radical scepticism. As soon as anti-Aristotelian authors no longer unconditionally accepted the seemingly harmless assumption that 'nature does nothing in vain' and the assumption that our hierarchically ordered capacities function the way they are 'naturally apt to do', they began to realize that one could and even should ask why the senses and intellect ought to be trusted. Why can we be so certain that there is a natural causal process that starts with material things and ends with mostly correct judgements about them? And why can we be sure that our cognitive capacities are so trustworthy that we can pick out the few cases in which incorrect judgements are produced? Do we not first need a guarantee for the general reliability of our cognitive capacities? But how can we provide this guarantee without presupposing that there is a natural order for our capacities, including the capacities we use to look for this guarantee? Only a rejection of some basic metaphysical assumptions, which implied a rejection of some deeply held Aristotelian convictions,

⁴⁷ See William Ockham, *Quodl.*, II, q. 10 (*Opera theologica*, ed. by Gál and others, IX, p. 161).

made these questions possible in the seventeenth century.⁴⁸ One should therefore not look for Cartesian problems in the fourteenth century — such problems do not make sense in the context of an Aristotelian world view that was deeply committed to the reliability of our natural capacities.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The driving force in seventeenth-century debates, most evident in Descartes's *Meditations*, was therefore not simply external world scepticism, but an all-embracing capacity scepticism: the existence and adequate use of *all* capacities, including those yielding purely logical and mathematical insights, was questioned. It is therefore hardly surprising that Descartes first and foremost attempted to establish a guarantee for the reliability of all our capacities. For a detailed analysis, see Perler, 'Woran können wir zweifeln?'

⁴⁹ I am grateful to all the participants of the Cambridge conference for valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper, and to Dallas Denery, Kantik Ghosh, Martin Lenz, Stephan Schmid, and Eric Oberheim for detailed written remarks.

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HOW IS IT POSSIBLE TO BELIEVE FALSELY? JOHN BURIDAN, THE VETULA, AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ERROR

Christophe Grellard

A number of medieval philosophers and theologians, influenced to varying degrees by Aristotle's claim in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that 'truth is the good of the intellect',¹ developed naturalized theories of knowledge. According to these theories, man is naturally intended to know the truth.² Both the thirteenth-century Dominican theologian Thomas Aquinas and the fourteenth-century secular master John Buridan, for example, shared this assumption about our cognitive processes, and this means that both thinkers modelled their epistemological theories after successful cognitive encounters.³ The acquisition of truth was understood to be the cognitive norm

I would like to thank Dallas Denery for correcting my English and Benoît Patar for sending me some Buridanian material. I would also like to thank the participants of the meeting for their responses to a first version of this text.

¹ Aristotle, *Ethica ad nicomachum*, VI, 2, 1139a 27–28: 'Verum est bonum intellectus'. See Aristotle, *Les Auctoritates*, ed. by Hamesse, p. 240.

² By a naturalized epistemology, I mean an epistemology which gives an account of the cognitive processes by means of the causal relationship between the mind and the world. Such an epistemology can also be labelled as externalist. See for example Goldman, 'A Causal Theory of Knowing'.

³ On Aquinas, see Kretzmann, 'Infallibility, Error and Ignorance'; on Buridan, see Zupko, 'Buridan on Skepticism' and Klima, *John Buridan*, chs 11 and 12, pp. 234–58, especially pp. 253–57.

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and instances of error the exception. Simply put, naturalized epistemologies attempt to treat sceptical arguments as irrelevant for understanding how we come to know the world. However, in addition to the theoretical problems naturalized epistemologies must confront concerning the possibility of knowing the truth, it remains the case that, from time to time, errors do occur. How can naturalized epistemologies account for such cognitive failures? One way into this problem is to consider how medieval thinkers respond to sceptical challenges.⁴ Another way to answer this question is to clarify the epistemic status of belief or opinion (*doxa*, *opinio*), understood as incomplete access to the truth.⁵ This is the problem I would like to address here. One interesting way to investigate the psychology of error is to consider the attitude of uneducated people (*vulgares*, *simplices*, *rustici*, etc.) whose cognitive processes are less trained than those of literate scholastic arts masters and theologians. Buridan adopts precisely this approach. Indeed, he places real importance on the opinions of laymen and, in particular, on the case of the 'little old woman' (*vetula*).

What is the difference between ordinary and scientific knowledge in fourteenth-century philosophy? On the one hand, the Aristotelian inheritance introduced to scientific knowledge several highly sophisticated criteria based on demonstration and certitude, as Eileen Sweeney demonstrates in this volume.⁶ On the other hand, those criteria fail to offer an account of ordinary knowledge or *opinio*.⁷ In a recent article, Robert Pasnau claims that the challenge for medieval epistemology was to explain how Aristotle's idealized criteria for knowledge could be modified to fit the vagaries of specific instances of knowledge. He believes Buridan was close to a solution.⁸ Indeed, Buridan partially weakens the notion of evidentness by introducing the idea of relative evidentness which is enough for natural science and moral action.⁹ Pasnau suggests that, with such a distinction, Buridan was interested in the way we form

⁴ See Grellard, 'Comment peut-on se fier à l'expérience?'; and Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit*.

⁵ Belief is usually defined in the Middle Ages as a reluctant assent, an assent with hesitation or with fear (*cum formidine*) that the opposite of our belief may be true. For a Thomistic point of view on this question, see Byrne, *Probability and Opinion*, pp. 61–76.

⁶ For an overview on this topic, see also Pasnau, 'Science and Certainty'; Grellard, 'Epistemology'. See supra pp. 37–62.

⁷ Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I, 33, 88b 30–89a 5.

⁸ Pasnau, 'Medieval Social Epistemology'.

⁹ Buridan's distinction of a twofold evidentness is well known. On this question, see Grellard, *Croire et savoir*, pp. 262–72; Biard, *Science et nature*, pp. 23–38.

beliefs in various domains. This attention to belief formation, Pasnau claims, was the first step on the way to a 'social epistemology'.¹⁰ I want to suggest here that Pasnau's thesis is right and that, perhaps, Buridan is even closer to such a social epistemology than Pasnau thinks. To this end, I have considered one aspect of Buridan's theory of error. I try to make clear how Buridan considers it possible for a human agent to give a false assent to appearances, that is, how it is possible to think that a misleading appearance is true. Buridan faces a crucial problem since he defends, as do most fourteenth-century nominalists, a naturalized conception of knowledge in which knowledge is the result of a causal relationship between external objects and the mind. Under normal circumstances, reliable knowledge is the rule and error the exception. But such exceptions can and do occur. Therefore, the challenge for Buridan is to explain how defects can occur in the causal process and why we are sometimes unable to identify them. In order to accomplish this, Buridan must admit other social and psychological criteria into his theory of knowledge. This is nowhere so clear as in the case of the *vetula* or little old woman who exemplifies failed belief formation.

The figure of the little old woman occupies an interesting place in medieval writings. The work of Jole Agrimi and Chiara Crisciani has underlined the importance of the little old woman in works of medicine, natural philosophy, and theology.¹¹ For physicians, on the one hand, the *vetula* is a potential competitor, whose pseudo-medical practices have to be kept in check. For theologians and philosophers, on the other hand, the little old woman is considered as a vector of beliefs. She possesses a credulity testifying to a pure faith, but one that is always susceptible to superstition and even heresy. The weakness of her intellect leaves room for the effects of the imagination and the strength of her imagination makes her more sensitive to superstition and false belief. Her intellectual weakness and susceptibility to the imagination therefore lead her easily into superstition and false belief. This feminine figure combines multiple functions, sometimes positive, sometimes negative.

John Buridan, in other words, is hardly alone in occasionally taking up the case of the little old woman in some of his texts. If, in some respects, his conception of the *vetula* seems to belong to a literary tradition, deriving in part

¹⁰ Actually, Pasnau does not explain what he means by 'social epistemology', but we may suppose he implicitly adopts the theory of Alvin Goldman. For a critical assessment of the idea of a social epistemology, see Engel, 'Une épistémologie sociale peut-elle être aléthiste?'.

¹¹ Agrimi and Crisciani, 'Savoir médical et anthropologie religieuse'.

from preachers' *exempla*, shared by and revealing the prejudices of the learned medieval community, Buridan also claims to report personal experiences with the *vetula*. The testimony of the *vetula* is valuable because it concerns an actual case, a case worth careful analysis because the behaviour of the *vetula* only makes sense within the framework of a more general theory about belief formation. The *vetula* interests Buridan in so far as she exemplifies some of the cognitive gaps that explain how error is possible and how false beliefs are formed. I will first present Buridan's general theory of belief formation, and then turn to an examination of how the *vetula* can form false beliefs.

The Formation of Belief

Assent occupies a fundamental place in Buridan's epistemology.¹² An act of assent is determined by cognitive representations which, once accumulated, generate a scientific or simply opinative *habitus*. This *habitus* makes it easier for a person to assent to the content of a proposition. The key to Buridan's theory of belief hinges on this notion of habit, understood as the repetition of acts favouring assent.¹³ It is this notion of *habitus* that permits us to understand the epistemic fallibility linked to belief.

Belief and Appearance

If we define belief as a *habitus* inclining us to behave or to act in certain ways in certain circumstances, we need to elaborate a process which leads from appearance (*apparentia*), to desire, to action. Buridan describes this process in various places, particularly in the *tertia lectura* of the *Questions on the soul* (L. III, q. 18 and 20). Here is Buridan's general outline of how judgements are formed: an appearance, that is, a conscious cognitive mental state, produces a conceptual judgement in rational animals and a pre-conceptual one in irrational animals.¹⁴

¹² On this topic, see Biard, *Science et nature*, pp. 17–22; Grellard, 'L'âne et les petites vieilles'.

¹³ Belief (*opinio*) is defined as a habit of assent (*habitus assentivus*) in Buridan, *Questiones super de anima III*, ed. by Zupko, q. 16 (p. 181).

¹⁴ Buridan, *Questiones super de anima III*, ed. by Zupko, q. 18 (p. 201–02), Buridan distinguishes several meanings of *apparentia*. Appearance is used in an epistemic sense to mean the occurrence of a true cognition. In the case of sensible appearances, the appearance still needs to be corrected by the intellect. Buridan also distinguishes two other meanings: in a larger sense, the term means any cognitive event, that is, everything which appears to a conscious subject. In

This judgement includes both the sorts of quasi-reasonings based on the *estimativa* we find in animals, and the deliberative reasonings unique to human beings. It consists in estimating the value, the truth, and the goodness (*sub ratione veri und boni*) of what is represented in the *apparentia*. This judgement or cognitive assent, in turn, generates an appetite which results in an action. In this generalized scheme, the action is determined by an impression extrinsic to the motive faculty of desiring, namely by a cognitive determination. The cognitive faculty, that is the capacity of animals to judge on the basis of sensations, determines the sensory appetite to pursue what appears to be pleasant and to avoid what appears to be unpleasant. In the case of rational animals, it is necessary to take into account the function of reason, although this is not always at work. Buridan writes:

Among the animals of the more perfect species, the heart is moved by a movement of dilation and contraction that passes on the vital spirits through the entire body, and the same impulse passes through each member. And this movement is attributed to the vegetative faculty since it is present in us when we sleep and when we are not aware of it, as also when we are. But it is true that sometimes this movement is prevented in some way: either it is delayed, or it is boosted by sensory apprehensions causing the passions of the sensory appetite, such as anger, fear, pleasure, sadness, and others of this kind.¹⁵

These passions modify the *apparentia* which is at the origin of the motion.¹⁶ As we shall see, the introduction of the passions is crucial for understanding the possibility of error. The general outline of motion is something like this: an appearance, eventually modified by a passion, produces the formation of a sentence which itself serves as the object of a judgement. The intellect, either spontaneously or through deliberation, produces an initial cognitive assent,

a stricter sense, the term means the object of intellectual assent by which the intellect judges the truth of a thing according to its evidence.

¹⁵ Buridan, *Questiones super de anima* III, ed. by Zupko, q. 20 (p. 218): 'In animalibus autem perfectiarum specierum, movetur cor motu dilationis et constrictionis ad mittendum spiritus vitales per totum corpus, et provenit idem pulsus per singula membra. Et ille motus attribuitur potentiae vegetativae quia ille sit nobis dormientibus et non cognoscentibus sicut cognoscentibus. Verum est tamen quod ille motus aliquando impeditur aliqualiter: vel retardatur vel velocitatur per sensitivas apprehensiones causantes passiones appetitus sensitivi, ut iram, timorem, delectationem, tristitiam, et huiusmodi.'

¹⁶ As far as I know, there is no detailed study of Buridan's theory of passion. General remarks can be found in Agrimi, 'Les *Quaestiones de sensu* attribuées à Albert de Saxe', and, in a wider context, Knuuttila, *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*.

‘This is true’. This assent entails the first act of the will which is the first act of the appetite. This act is completely determined by the judgement of the intellect and is an act of pleasure or pain. This entails a second act of will, peculiar to man, which is an act of acceptance (or effective appetite). This act, under certain conditions, is free, but once produced it inevitably entails action.¹⁷

At the root of every belief, there is first a cognitive appearance based on the sensation and a *fantasia*; second, there is a judgement (an act of estimation or evaluation) which evaluates the appearance as true or false, good or bad; and third, there is a set of physical habits capable of modifying both the cognitive appearance and the judgement about it. Nevertheless, a single appearance is not enough to generate belief (*opinio*). Belief, as an intellectual habit, depends on a process of sedimentation of appearances. Buridan’s examination of this sedimentation takes place within the framework of the opposition between the natural and the habitual. Among the powers (*potentiae*), that is, the abilities to act, we have to distinguish among those which are determined by themselves (*per se*) to produce something, those which are determined by a single external factor, and those which are determined by several external factors. Gravity is an example of the first type of power. A body naturally moves towards its proper place in the absence of some hindrance. The second type of power concerns cases in which the action depends on outside forces. For example, as soon as iron is placed near a magnet, it moves towards the magnet. With the third type, the power is determined by one or more factors. For example, when the intellect grasps a true proposition, say, the first principle, it gives its assent to it, and the more it grasps this truth, the more it will recognize and assent to it. However, while the first two cases admit no exceptions, the last one does. Since it concerns powers which are determined by several acts, this case does not belong strictly to the domain of nature, but to the domain of the habitual. Such a power can be influenced by opposed factors to the extent that the intellect goes against its natural inclination. Buridan writes:

A power determined by itself to an act cannot, then, admit an opposite determination because then it would not be determined by itself but indifferent, etc. A power is twofold. The first can be determined to an act by a single movement or a single action. [...]. The other requires multiple and persisting actions of the same nature

¹⁷ See Buridan, *Questiones super de anima III*, ed. by Zupko, q. 18 (p. 204): ‘Dico ergo quod assensum sive iudicium assentium consequitur alius actus appetitus qui non habet nomen proprium impositum, sed solet vocari appetitus efficax, quia statim ab eo sequitur actualis prosecutio vel fuga, si non sit prohibens aut defectus instrumenti requisiti ad motum prosecutionis vel fugae’.

for its determination. The first one of these powers, unlike the second, cannot be developed through repetition. The reason is that the process of habituation results properly from multiple similar operations, as the generation of the habits inclining and determining the powers to similar operations. Now, this last power is found in many, but not all, of the soul's faculties.¹⁸

Any act of knowledge which pertains to the intellectual faculty rests on this repetition of acts. Repetition generates a habit which makes it easier to reproduce such acts in the future. Scientific knowledge, just like opinion, is thus built by the repetition of acts and the production of habit. In the case of scientific cognitive acts, especially those concerning scientific principles, there is a natural tendency in the intellect to adhere to them, so that opposed acts (the negation of the scientific principles) are accepted by the intellect with difficulty. It is, therefore, difficult, but not impossible, according to Buridan, for custom, education, and habit to produce in the intellect a habit against accepting scientific principles and this can lead the intellect to reject them.¹⁹ On the other hand, in the case of opinions that rest on more strictly empirical cognitions, the frequency of acts opposed to the natural assent can produce a habit against the truth. It is this point which partly explains the psychology of error according to Buridan.

Summarizing, we could say that Buridan defends a holistic conception of belief such that *opinio* is a corpus of appearances produced by sensation, imagination and reason. A belief is naturally produced by several appearances. For this reason, the production of cognitive acts as beliefs is a natural phe-

¹⁸ Buridan, *Quaestiones super decem libros ethicorum* II, q. 2, f. 23rab: 'Sed potentia determinata de se ad aliquem actum non potest illa determinatione admittere et oppositam accipere quia iam non esset secundum se determinata sed indifferens, immo etc. Item potentia indifferens duplex est. Alia namque est que per unum solum motum vel unam actionem solam potest sufficienter determinari ad actum. [...] Alia est que ad sui determinationem indiget multiplicatis perseveratis operationibus eiusdem rationis. Prima autem istarum potentiarum non est proprie assuefactibilis, sed secunda. Cuius ratio est quia assuefactio proprie fit ex multiplicatis operationibus consimilibus tanquam generatio habitus inclinantis et determinantis potentias ad similes operationes. Hec autem ultima potentia invenitur inter multas anime potentias licet non ad omnes'. *Indifferens*, here, means a faculty's ability to choose between multiple options. This text is well analysed in Zupko, *John Buridan*, pp. 235–37.

¹⁹ Buridan, *Quaestiones super decem libros ethicorum* II, q. 2, f. 23ra: 'Ad aliam potest dici quod intellectus ita determinatus est ad assentiendum veritati primorum principiorum secundum omnino et per se notorum capiendam, quod non potest assuefieri ad negandum. Sed de aliquibus principiis non omnino primis et per se notis potest bene assuefieri ad negandum quia non est omnino determinatus ad veritates ipsorum secundum se'.

nomenon in which the intellect is naturally determined to believe. But as Buridan also insists, natural necessity does not strictly determine the intellectual faculty's acts. Rather, several appearances incline them towards an act. Now, these appearances are not always consistent among themselves. The ability of the cognitive power to be influenced by multiple and opposed acts explains its occasional fallibility.

Belief and Epistemic Fallibility

According to Buridan, in normal epistemic contexts, exemplified by the apprehension of first principles, human cognitive faculties are characterized by a natural tendency to the truth. As he claims in his *Questions on the Posterior Analytics*, the tendency of the intellect to assent to the truth is as natural as the tendency of fire to burn and of wheat to ripen. Similarly, appearances usually entail assent.²⁰ Nevertheless, since multiple acts can determine our faculties, acquired habits can sometimes oppose the naturalness of assent. Besides cases in which the object is grasped in an imperfect way, it is necessary to take into account 'habitual errors' that arise from the sedimentation of acts contrary to the nature of our faculties. An assent's natural inclination to truth may be impeded in either a natural way, by other natural habits, or in a non-natural way, by the free will.

Buridan distinguishes four kinds of relationship between the act of assent and its object. First of all, assent may be suspended because of the undecidability of the object, for example, when we wonder whether the number of stars is even or odd. Second, suspension of assent may occur when the probable arguments *pro et contra* are equally compelling. Third, we can assent with hesitation when we possess a conclusive, but non-demonstrative, argument. Fourth, and finally, we can assent without hesitation when the intellect is completely determined, for example, when the object is grasped in a complete way or when we possess a syllogistic demonstration.²¹ Error, understood as false assent, may occur in the

²⁰ Buridan, *Questiones super libros posteriorum analyticorum* I, q. 2 (unpublished typescript by Hubert Hubien): 'Unde sicut ignis est naturaliter inclinatus ad calefaciendum et grave ad descendendum, ita intellectus est naturaliter inclinatus ad intelligendum obiecta sibi sufficienter praesentata, et etiam naturaliter inclinatus ad comprehensionem veritatis primorum principiorum complexorum'.

²¹ Buridan, *Quaestiones super decem libros ethicorum* VII, q. 6, f. 143ra: 'Sed oportebit videre quod intellectus noster habens in se formatam propositionem potest ad iudicium de veritate ipsius se habere quadrupliciter. Uno modo quod ratione vel apparentia careat ad utramque par-

third case which is characterized by the hesitation of the knower. Belief (as a habit) is a factor of assent in the first three cases, but is ruled out in the last one. Belief can effect assent in a voluntary or, more frequently, an involuntary way. The influence of the will in the process of forming belief and assent is, according to Buridan, rather weak. The main role of the will is to suspend assent in cases of conflict between beliefs, and to look forward to additional information that will resolve the conflict:

The will is, moreover, capable of deciding that it should perform neither act, but instead defer them. And for this, it needs no other determination than itself, otherwise we would have no more free will than a dog.²²

In some cases, Buridan admits that the will can impose a belief, that is, an appearance can be accepted without being completely grasped and justified, or even when it is contrary to justified true belief. The most famous example of this concerns the Trinity. The free will can decide to choose to accept something with little evidence, something that violates the principle of non-contradiction and that is opposed to the first figure of the syllogism:

[T]he free will can determine a man to believe the less evident, such as the articles of faith. It also can, in the same way, determine the intellect to reject what the great philosophers thought to be known and evident principles. Hence, Aristotle thought that the following form of the expository syllogism was a necessary, formal and self-evident evident inference: This C is an A, and this C is a B, therefore this B is an A [...]. But, in order to uphold the article of faith about Trinity, the will may be able to choose that it will not believe such an inference.²³

tem, sicut forte esset de probleumate an astra sint paria. Alio modo, quod habeat ad utramque partem rationes probabiles, sed tamen nondum determinantes ipsum ad unam partem vel ad aliam, sicut esset forte de probleumate an formae substantiales elementorum maneant substantialiter in mixto. Tertio modo quod per rationes ex una parte vincentes determinetur ad iudicium unius partis, sed tamen non sine formidine ad oppositum. [...] Quarto modo quod intellectus ex toto sit ad unam partem determinatus omni formidine remota.

²² Buridan, *Quaestiones in metaphysicem Aristoteles* VI, q. 5, f. 36vb: 'Et est etiam sufficiens ad eliciendum quod neutrum actum producat. Sed differat nec ad ista indiget alio determinante nisi ipsamet aliter non esset plus liberi arbitrii quam canis.'

²³ Buridan, *Summulae de demonstrationibus*, ed. by De Rijk, pp. 100–01: 'Iterum, voluntas libera potest hominem determinare ad credendum minime evidentia, ut articulos fidei, et potest etiam, pari ratione, determinare intellectum ad non credendum quae magni philosophi putarent esse principia per se nota et evidentia. Unde Aristotiles putavit hanc formam syllogismi expository esse consequentiam necessariam formalem et per se evidentem, scilicet hoc C est A et hoc idem C est B; ergo B est A, et similiter istam, in primo modo primae figurae, omne B est A et

In the same way, Buridan continues, the will of heretics leads them to firmly held beliefs about false things:

Heretics sometimes prefer to die than to deny the object of their assent. But such an assent does not produce scientific knowledge, since it lacks the truth along with the certitude and the solidity of the truth.²⁴

The intervention of the will in the process of belief is usually limited either to the suspension of judgement or to the assent to supernatural objects supported by binding authorities. Buridan never precisely describes this psychological phenomenon in detail, perhaps because in most cases, belief determines assent in a non-voluntary and unconscious way. Among these cases, some beliefs are true, others are false. A false belief occurs in all those many cases where the action of a natural faculty is opposed by a habit engendered by the repetition of an incomplete or false appearance. These cases may depend on education or custom. A bad education can lead a person to reject the true and to prefer the false. Turning to the beliefs of the little old woman allows Buridan to bring to light the habitual dimension of belief, and the function of this process of sedimentation.

The Cognitive Psychology of the Little Old Woman

For the most part, Buridan seems to conceive of the *vetula* in the same way as most medieval physicians or theologians.²⁵ The little old woman is characterized by weak reason and a corrupt imagination which lead her to take refuge in a credulity sometimes bordering on superstition. However, at moments, it seems Buridan does not want to stigmatize the *vetula*. Rather, he desires to understand her psychology. Such a psychology has to be considered in the framework of his theory of belief as it exemplifies the connections between knowledge and opinion, reason and imagination. For that purpose, Buridan draws not only on the

omne C est B; ergo omne C est A; et tamen voluntas, propter articulum de trinitate sustinere, potest facere non credere illis consequentiis’.

²⁴ Buridan, *Questiones super libros posteriorum analyticorum* 1, q. 2 (unpublished typescript by Hubert Hubien): ‘sicut faciunt haeretici, qui aliquando magis volunt mori quam negare illud cui ipsi assenserunt, tamen non est scientia propter talem assensum, quia deficit veritas et certitudo et firmitas veritatis’.

²⁵ The *Vieille* in *Le Roman de la rose* offers typical example of clerical misogyny. For an overview of the status of women, and especially old women in medieval literature, see Ribémont, ‘Sagesse ou Folie?’, pp. 134–47.

representation of the *vetula* in the scholastic imagination, but also on his own experience of the rural Picard world. In fact, as will become clear, it is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of occurrences of the little old woman in the work of Buridan. First, Buridan presents the little old woman either as an example of common sense or, more frequently, as an example of credulity due to her intellectual weakness and submission to the imagination. Second, in his *Questions on the Meteorology*, Buridan examines how the old woman's popular beliefs are produced.

Belief and Credulity

Buridan's most famous use of the *vetula* considers the reactions of old women to the logical paradoxes in order to highlight the mechanics of credulity and naive simplicity:²⁶

It is thus necessary to notice that, when we propose very solid principles, although the intellect approves them of necessity and cannot not approve them, it may, however, sometimes occur because of sophisms tending to demonstrate the opposite, that assent weakens and results in a kind of doubt. I investigated this as it concerns

²⁶ On simplicity as a kind of common sense, see Buridan, *Questiones super de anima* II, q. 17, in Sobol, 'John Buridan on the Soul and Sensation', p. 243: 'Primo, quia propter manifestam visionem coloris vetula scit se videre illum colorem et ipsa vel etiam nos nescimus nos videre illam speciem, immo interrogata diceret se nihil videre nisi ea quae sunt extra ante oculos'; and Buridan, *Questiones super de anima* III, ed. by Zupko, q. 9 (p. 94): 'Tertia conclusio est quod vulgares et vetulae faciliter ipsum intellectum nostrum intelligunt, quia faciliter possunt formare conceptus communes a quibus sumuntur haec nomina *ens, unum, res, aliquid*, etc.; et tamen his et unoque eorum omne ens indifferenter intelligitur, et per consequens intellectus humanus. Item, alio modo vetula intelligit intellectum suum, quia ipsa iudicat et experitur se scire et credere quod nullus canis est equus et quod omnis equus quem videt est maior cane; igitur ipsa cognoscit se hoc scientem vel credentem. Cum haec autem universalia scire non possit nisi per intellectum suum, constat quod haec ipsa sciens et credens quod non est corpus tantum, sed compositum ex corpore et intellectu, igitur, cognoscendo se hoc scientem, ipsa compositum ex corpore et intellectu cognoscit et corpus et intellectum cognoscit, licet confuse et non distincte'. Simplicity may also become ignorance. See the devout little old woman, in *Questiones super de anima* I, q. 2 (unpublished transcription by Benoît Patar): 'tamen non propter hoc oportet dicere quod omnis talis notitia sit peccatum culpabile, quia tunc nullus deberet studere in philosophia: omnes enim in ea studentes, quantumcumque proveci, habent multas operationes falsas, immo plures quam una vetula quae tantum orationes suas dicit circa ignem et circa pauca considerat. Sed quia non est in libertate nostra invenire demonstrationes vel solvere rationes facientes nos illis falsis assentire, ideo non culpamur: ignorantia enim invicibilis excusat peccatum, ut habetur in III^o *Ethicorum*'.

the first principle. I asked many little old women if they believed it possible to eat and not to eat at the same moment, and all answered me that no, it is not possible. Then I asked, 'You do know that God is almighty, that he can annihilate the whole world; do you believe that God can make it so that you can eat and not eat at the same time?' And the little old women answered: 'We do not know.'²⁷

The purpose of this questioning is to show that we can weaken assent to principles by means of insoluble arguments. Buridan then reports an experience (*expertus sum*). He questions several little old women, asking them if they believe they can eat and not eat at the same time, and all of them answer negatively. Then he asks them if God, who they know is almighty (because he can destroy the world), can make it so that they can eat and not eat at the same time. All of them answer that they did not know. This is an extreme case of suspension of assent because it is impossible to choose between the opposed arguments. Here, the universality of the principle of non-contradiction is counterbalanced by the possibility of divine power. The strength of the appearances being equal, they cancel each other out and this leads to a suspension of judgement. At first glance, it seems we are dealing here with two opposed pieces of knowledge (because the little old women know the principle of non-contradiction and they know that God is almighty). Nevertheless, their confusion rests on a sophism because what is presented as knowledge is not actually knowledge. Theologians know that although God is almighty, omnipotence is limited by the principle of non-contradiction. On the other hand, the little old women understand God's omnipotence on the basis of an example — God can destroy the world and they take this to mean that God's power is without limit. If he can destroy the world, they reason to themselves, think what else he can do. Therefore, they have a false belief deriving from their imagination and based on a dogma they do not understand. This false belief weakens their natural assent to the first principle. The case of the little old women exemplifies the classic opposition between learned and popular faith, and underlines the spontaneity of the latter. Hence, Buridan explains, quoting Averroes, the

²⁷ Buridan, *Quaestiones super decem libros ethicorum* VI, q. 11, f. 127vb: 'Si igitur est opinandum quod cum nobis proponuntur principia firmissima licet eis intellectus necessario assentiat, et non possit eis dissentire tamen aliquando per sophisticationes in oppositum occurrentes contingit adhesionem debilitari et tandem quamdam formidinem generari; et hoc expertus sum de primo principio ut michi videtur quesivi eum a multis vetulis utrum crederent quod possent simul comedere et non comedere, et statim responderunt quod non. Tunc igitur, ego sic arguebam: vos scitis quod deus est omnipotens, ipse potest totum mundum adnichilare, creditis ne ergo quod deus posset facere quod simul comederetis et non comederetis, et responderunt nescio'.

faith of the simple is both stronger than that of the philosophers (because it is less often rationally examined), and more sensitive to fables and childishness (*fabularia and puerilia*):

For this reason, also, the Commentator claims in the prologue to the third book of the *Physics* that the faith of the layman is stronger than the faith of the philosophers, since the layman is not accustomed to hearing anything else, but the philosophers hear many different things.²⁸

The little old women's credulity is not itself irrational. It results from a bad education (that is, a faith based on dogma they cannot understand) and on greater spontaneity when she gives her assent to appearances. Therefore, the problem of the faith of the little old women depends partly on the function of their imagination in the formation of belief.

The Powers of Imagination

The spontaneity of the beliefs of the *vetulae* is explained by their physical habits and by the constitution of their faculties.²⁹ Buridan admits implicitly the medieval commonplace according to which old women reside at the intersection of the microcosm and the macrocosm, and are more sensitive to physical and natural influences (especially astral ones).³⁰ He explains in his *Commentary on 'Of Sleep and Wakefulness'* (Tr. 2, chap. 2) that *vetulae* dream more vividly and frequently than wise men (which argument allows for the exclusion of dreams of divine origin, since God would otherwise be giving more and better dreams

²⁸ Buridan, *Quaestiones super decem libros ethicorum* VI, q. 11, f. 127ra: 'Propter quod etiam commentator in prologo tertii physicorum dicit quod ideo fides vulgi est fortior quam fides philosophorum quoniam vulgus non assuevit audire aliud, philosophi autem audiunt multi'. For Averroes, see Schmiejka, 'Drei Prologe im großen *Physikkommentar* des Averroes?.'

²⁹ This point is dealt at length in Agrimi and Crisciani, 'Savoir médical et anthropologie religieuse', pp. 1297–99.

³⁰ See Muchembled, *Culture populaire et culture des élites*, p. 86: 'Située à l'intersection de la vie, et donc de la mort, elle [that is, the woman] est de ce fait portée à interpréter les signes du danger, corporels ou "naturels", et à les relier entre eux. Aussi déduit-elle du macrocosme ce qui peut avoir une action sur le microcosme du corps humain, et vice versa. Vieillissante, elle tire de son expérience une certaine puissance sociale, un certain respect, même si elle n'est ni guérisseuse ni sorcière'. Another text, the *Evangelies des Quenouilles*, belonging to the same Picard cultural area, presents the old women as gifted with a divinatory ability. See Paupert-Bouchiez, 'Sages femmes ou sorcières?', p. 275. The different versions of this text are edited in Paupert, *Les fileuses et le clerc*, pp. 271–322.

to the silly person than to the wise one). In particular, little old women are much more receptive to dreams *ex parte celi*, that is, dreams caused by changes in the sublunary world and particularly changes in the human body that have themselves been caused by celestial bodies.³¹ This sensitivity in little old women to astral influences is due to their vacuous imaginations:

Little old women and ignoramuses often dream more correctly because their imaginations are emptier and less occupied. For that reason, they can receive the influences of celestial bodies in a much purer and clearer manner.³²

In so far as their imagination is not occupied by a multitude of previous experiences, as is that of the scholar, it is more receptive to the weak appearances that occur mostly in sleep. The imagination of little old women is characterized by its greater purity and thus its greater receptiveness.

In itself, this capacity of the old woman's imagination to be easily stimulated is not a defect, but it does leave it more susceptible to the passions. As has been said, the action of the passions, via the vegetative and the sensitive parts of the soul, can modify the appearances which lead to assent. Buridan explains, in the *Commentary on 'Of sleep and wakefulness'* (Tr. 2, chap. 2, ccl. 1, 2 and 5), that judgement based mainly on *fantasia* is more easily deceived because such judgement varies according to passion. Passionate persons are more easily deceived by their senses. For example, the timid person who hears mice in the walls imagines they are devils and he will hide his head under the bed:

Those who are subject to passions are easily deceived about sensation. Experience makes this clear: when shy people hear mice moving straw, they may believe they are thieves, robbers, or devils, and they hide their head under their bed. And the same is true in the case of other passions, such as love, hate, and so on. All of these are moved by a little movement which appears to be big. It is also clear with the frenzied: when they see some little lines on a wall, they say there are big animals.³³

³¹ On Buridan's account of divination by dreams, see Grellard, 'La Réception médiévale du *De somno et vigilia*'.

³² Buridan, *Expositio super de somno et vigilia*, tract. 2, cap. 4 (unpublished transcription by Benoît Patar): 'vetulae et ignari communiter somniant rectius, eo quod imaginatio eorum est magis vacua et minus occupata, ideo plurimi purius et apparentius possunt recipere influentias corporum caelestium'.

³³ Buridan, *Expositio super de somno et vigilia*, tract. 2, cap. 2 (unpublished transcription by Benoît Patar): 'Est autem quinta conclusio quod existentes in passionibus facilius decipiuntur circa sensus. Et hoc est manifestum per experientias: qui enim sunt timidi, contingit, si mures moveant stramina loci sui, quod ipsi credunt esse fures vel latrones vel diabolos, et abscondunt

Taken together, the receptivity of the *vetula*'s imagination and her susceptibility to passion explains, to a large extent, her beliefs.³⁴

In the prologue to his *Questions on the Meteorology*, Buridan wonders about the value of this science.³⁵ He insists explicitly on the wonderful object of this science, and therefore implicitly argues for its difficulty. The first point is exemplified by a set of themes which pertain to popular beliefs about supernatural phenomena — will-o'-the-wisps in cemeteries, celestial gaps, storms produced by devils, and so on. The task of the philosopher is to find the natural causes of these phenomena in order to eliminate appeals to the supernatural. At the same time, Buridan claims that most of the answers proposed in this science are only probable. The causes behind most meteorological phenomena are hidden, such that the questions raised cannot be answered with certainty. But a part of the scientist's work is to find rational accounts in order to eliminate false beliefs. Buridan emphasizes this later in the treatise when he rejects the

capita in lecto; et ita est de illis qui sunt in aliis passionibus ut qui sunt in amore vel odio vel in aliquo tali: tales enim omnes a valde modico apparenti magno motu moventur. Hoc etiam apparet de freneticis qui videntes parvas lineas in pariete dicunt quod sunt magna animalia.

³⁴ To my knowledge Buridan does not speak about superstition.

³⁵ Buridan, *Quaestiones super metheorum*, ed. by Bagès, Prooemium (pp. 1–2): 'Si scientiam opinamur honorabiliorem ex eo, ceteris paribus, quod est de magis mirabilibus et appetibiliorem, prout habetur in prohemio De Anima, constat quod scientiam libri metheorum valde reputare debemus honorabilem et super ceteras plurimas appetibilem. Opera namque metheorologica inter cetera nobis apparentia sunt mirabiliora. Miramur enim lucernas in cimiteriis et sub patibulis ardentes, tamquam animarum mortuorum ad sua corpora venientium operationes. Miramur stellarum cadentium et cometarum generationes et corruptiones, tamquam partes celi cottidie corrumpantur et tandem corpora celestia destruantur. Admirantur homines coruscationes, hiatus et voragines, tamquam celi dividantur et aperiantur, admirantur ecnepharum, typhonum et fulminum vehementes tempestates, tamquam non sint nature sed potius demonum potestates, verbi gratia. Pro hoc enim grossissime arbores franguntur, torquentur et omnino simul eradicantur, lapides grossi alter per aerem eleuantur et longe portantur, edificia fortissima destruuntur per motus terre, civitates subvertuntur, etc. Hec enim et similia sunt metheorologica. Quis ergo ignorantium causas huiusmodi non mirabitur hec et alia ut tot aquarum salsedines, tantorum montium elevationes? Ergo, sicut habetur prohemii Metaphysice, conveniens est huius artis inventorem et operum predictorum causas scientem ab hominibus mirari tamquam sapientem et ab aliis differentem. Ad quarum noticie causarum inventionem vel invente declarationem, proponimus questionum difficultatem huius scientie aliquas disputare et in aliquibus conclusionibus demonstrare, in aliis vero ex probabilibus et verisimilibus opiniones accipere, et in nonnullis nobis sufficiet si possumus usque ad non redargui pervenire, intendentes non solum que a doctoribus antiquis, sed etiam que a sociis modernis bene aut probabiliter dicta sunt recipere et congregare juxta illud secundo Metaphysice et secundum unum quidem nihil aut parum ei immittere ex omnibus autem coarticulatis fieri magnitudinem aliquam.'

attitude of peasants who, ignoring natural causes, look to supernatural (either divine or demonic) causes. He examines in particular three kinds of wondrous phenomena that he had previously mentioned in the prologue. In the first case, that of the will-o'-the-wisp, Buridan does not explain the cause of the little old women's error. He contents himself with a comparison of the scientific explanation and the popular interpretation of the phenomenon. The material cause of the phenomenon is the greasy fumes of corpses heated by warm and dry exhalations. Little old women attribute these lights to the souls of dead corpses.³⁶ Their mistake arises concerning the material cause:

Candles and burning lights appear mostly in cemeteries and under gibbets because in these places there is the greasy smoke from corpses. And the little old women attribute such phenomena to the souls of these dead.³⁷

The origin of this error is explained in the following question. The imagination leads the little old women to consider the flash of lightning as a gap in the sky, and a warning for the future. In the same way, the imagination leads them to interpret the sounds produced by the combustion of corpses as human voices. And finally, the light in the cemeteries can be explained by the action of the souls of the dead.³⁸

³⁶ Buridan, *Quaestiones super metheorum*, L. I, q. 8, p. 117–18: 'Notandum est breviter quod multipliciter dicitur aliquid naturale et non naturale: uno modo prout naturale distinguitur contra supernaturale, et est effectus supernaturalis quem vocamus miraculosum, ita quod talem effectum negaremus esse naturalem vel naturaliter factum, et alios vocaremus naturales. Manifestum est quod effectus predicti et alii metheorologici dicuntur naturales et naturaliter fieri et moveri, quia non miraculose a Deo gloriose et sublimo, scilicet preter solitum concursum aliorum agentium et passivorum, unde philosophi de hiis reddunt proprias causas et naturales. Multi tamen vulgares causas talium ignorantes credunt quod a Deo fiant miraculose quod non est verum ut communiter. Secundo modo, dicitur naturale prout distinguitur contra voluntarium alia voluntate a divina: voluntaria enim, ea ratione qua voluntaria, non vocamus naturalia sed artificialia et prudentialia vel forte malitiosa et prudentialibus opposita. Et hec ut sic non pertinent ad scientias naturales sed ad artes vel scientias morales, et manifestum est quod illi effectus metheorologici dicuntur hoc modo naturales: non enim reddimus de eis causa intellectum et voluntatem et causas naturales non cognoscentes ut elementa et astra et calidum et frigidum etc. Vetule tamen credunt sepe quod sint opera voluntaria demonum ut in magnis tempestatibus et fulguribus, quod non est puntandum'.

³⁷ Buridan, *Quaestiones super metheorum*, L. I, q. 9, p. 126: 'Inde etiam provenit quod candelae et lucerne ardentes apparent sepius in cimiteriis et sub patibulis, quia fit ibi fumus pinguis ex cadaveribus mortuorum. Et vetule talia attribuunt animabus ipsorum mortuorum'.

³⁸ Buridan, *Quaestiones super metheorum*, L. I, q. 10, p. 144–45: '[...] fumus multus ex calore solis in die factus intra corpus cadaveris vel alterius corporis inveniens strictum exitum sonat

Buridan develops the point in the Bk III, q. 2, when he wonders whether lightning (*fulmina*) is produced by devils or by natural causes.³⁹ This question allows him to clarify the psychology of little old women and, more generally, of all lay people. First, Buridan reports some facts related by peasants, and by women in particular (*mulieres, vetulae*) concerning, for example, fires caused by lightning, in which they report seeing devils carrying burning brands from house to house:

We claim that it is the work of the devils. First, because numerous peasants and numerous women claim to have seen, during lightning storms of this kind, big devils flying from ledge to ledge through the air between flashes of lightning. Similarly, in a city near us, there was once a big fire which propagated from house to house. And several women reported seeing from far off black devils taking burning brands and kindling the fire, from house to house. And one of them swore that she had seen a black man or a devil under this shape, seated at the top of a house, until, by the combustion, this house, with the devil, collapsed in the fire.⁴⁰

After having explained the natural causes of these phenomena, Buridan tries hard to deconstruct these rural experiences by identifying their origin and their psychological function. First of all, it is the imagination disturbed by the passion of fear (*passio timoris*) that produces the vision of things which do not exist, in this particular case, devils:

diversimode secundum exigentiam stricture et velocis exitus exalationis. Putatur autem ab audientibus esse vox humana talis qualem cogitant propter ymaginationem facientem putare quod illi effectus sint animarum mortuorum, sicut campana sonans videtur dicere quicquid vis ymaginari quod dicat.

³⁹ On this belief, see Berlioz, *Catastrophes naturelles et calamités au Moyen Âge*, pp. 41–53, and Berlioz, 'La Foudre au Moyen Âge', pp. 168–69.

⁴⁰ Buridan, *Quaestiones super metheorum*, L. III, q. 2 (unpublished transcription by Benoît Patar): 'Arguitur quod illa sunt opera daemonum. Primo, quia multi et multae rurales narrant in huiusmodi fulminibus et tempestatibus vidisse daemones magnos sicut cornos et cornices volantes per aerem in huiusmodi fulminibus. Et simili modo confuisset ignis magnus semel in una villa iuxta nos et transivisset vel volasset de quibusdam domibus ad alias domos. Dicebant plures mulieres se vidisse daemones nigros deferentes et excitantes ignem et tisones ardentes longe de domo ad domum. Et una illarum iurabat se vidisse unum hominem nigrum vel daemonem sub tali specie sedentem in alto super unam domum, donec in combustione illa domus cum daemone cecidit in ignem'.

Concerning the fact that devils appeared to women and to others, with horns or as black and naked men, I believe that this error is produced only by the imagination, with the passions of fear and anxiety strengthening it.⁴¹

This false experience (since it did not take place under normal conditions) is then amplified by speech, each person reporting not facts they experienced, but events described to them. Speech substituting for experience is the second cause of erroneous belief. Finally, these reports become authoritative when women relay it to children during the evening. These narratives produce an early perversion of reason by imagination:

And I think it is not true, but numerous things are said by remarkable wise men because men repeat in a misleading way what the peasants and the little old women frequently recall and what they tell to their children as certain.⁴²

We thus find in Buridan's analysis all the elements which may disturb the natural activity of the cognitive faculties in the production of true beliefs and knowledge. Such elements (education, habit, errors of perception) lead to the formation of false beliefs. It is mainly the superior power of the imagination that is responsible for the error in so far as it substitutes itself for reason and directs perception.

But imagination is not the only thing responsible. Indeed, error and the production of erroneous beliefs begin before the imagination acts. On the one hand, the imagination is modified by the vegetative soul through phenomena

⁴¹ Buridan, *Quaestiones super metheorum*, L. III, q. 2 (unpublished transcription by Benoît Patar): 'Quod autem mulieribus et aliis apparuerunt daemones sub speciebus cornorum aut hominum nudorum nigrorum, credo hoc fuisse nisi fantasiam iuvantibus in hoc errore, metu et passione timoris.'

⁴² Buridan, *Quaestiones super metheorum*, L. III, q. 2 (unpublished transcription by Benoît Patar): 'Et credo non esse verum, sed dicuntur multa a sapientibus notabilibus, quia hominibus trufatice dicuntur quae vulgares et vetulae memorie commudant et narrant filiis et filiabus tamquam certum'. See Muchembled, *Culture populaire et culture des élites*, pp. 89–90: 'Comme on le voit, l'influence des mères est plus complète sur les filles que sur les garçons. Mais ceux-ci ont néanmoins mémorisé, durant leurs premières années, les leçons et les exemples maternels. En outre, leur vie adolescente les pousse à fréquenter les veillées, pour y rencontrer les jeunes filles. Or, ces veillées, où étaient permises selon Noël du Fail *d'honnêtes familiaritez*, étaient aussi *contreroolez par un tas de vieilles*. [...]. Homme fait, pouvait-on ne pas être sensible d'une manière ou d'une autre à l'influence de la parole féminine répétitrice des mêmes thèmes et des mêmes hantises'. As pointed out by the French folklorist, Arnold van Gennep, in traditional societies, children are educated through fear and irony: Van Gennep, *Manuel de folklore français contemporain*, I, pp. 156–57.

such as the passions of fear or anxiety. On the other hand, the education of children strengthens habits of belief which themselves modify both the imagination and perception. If we consider the case of the *vetula*, Buridan proposes first of all that some wondrous phenomena provoke a kind of fear which calls for a supernatural explanation. This explanation is repeated during the process of learning and so produces a habit of belief (that devils exist, that they have certain kinds of shapes and perform certain kinds of actions). This habit, bound by fear and imagination, partially modifies our perception of the phenomena in question (say, fires produced by thunderstorms), and entails assent to something false. The examples chosen by Buridan in the set of opposed arguments illustrate well the process and are consistent with his general description of belief formation. Suppose that all the houses in my neighbourhood are burning. I would probably be frightened, my heart would race, my perception would be affected. I would not be able to focus my attention. In such a circumstance, I might confusedly perceive one of the house's black support beams. Now, if I had been told when I was young that devils frequently appear in great fires as black shapes, I would be led by this habitual knowledge to identify this black beam with a devil. And, if I were also told that devil's fire cannot be extinguished by water, but only by milk, I would not run for water. Would I in that case be irrational? Of course not. My opinion has its own consistency, even if a more accurate philosophical knowledge might allow me to reject the belief in devils and suggest other causes. If I possessed this different background of experiences or suddenly acquired it, I would be able to develop a new habitual opinion which would modify my perception of the facts. If I did not believe in the devil's actions, I would not confuse a beam with the devil.

Buridan does not want to stigmatize popular beliefs. Rather, he tries to understand the process of their formation. He tries to explain them with the help of a general theory of belief formation. Hence, he gives a psychological and sociological explanation of popular beliefs. Nevertheless, Buridan does not accept any sort of cultural relativism. He defends the idea that there is a basic level of rationality, common to each man: this basic rationality is exemplified by the natural and universal assent to first principles. But he seems also to defend something like a 'principe de coupure' (principle of inconsistency), to use the words of the anthropologist Roger Bastide.⁴³ The assent to first principles may coexist with other beliefs inconsistent with that principle (e.g., the false belief that an omnipotent God could make contradictory things). As long as

⁴³ See for example, Bastide, 'Le principe de coupure et le comportement afro-brésilien'.

this inconsistency is not explicit, there is no conflict between different beliefs. Buridan wants only to underline that there are many conditions affecting our acts of knowledge and some of them we cannot control. Finally, the old women merely exemplify this fact. In some cases, I can not help but fail since, given the context of knowledge, some of the necessary conditions are unknowable to me. In such conditions, to fail is not blameworthy: *ignorantia excusat peccatum*.⁴⁴

Conclusion

The few occurrences of the *vetula* in Buridan's work should not be overestimated. But they provide an interesting illustration of Buridan's explanation of belief formation. If it is correct to interpret Buridan's epistemology as a kind of reliabilism, it becomes then all the more important for him to explain how it is possible for gaps to occur in the normal and usual functioning of our cognitive tools. In other words, it is necessary to explain how false beliefs may be produced. Now, the examination of the case of the little old women (presented as a real case, even if it is partly a literary construction) brings to light the role of false beliefs and often unconscious factors that affect the imagination, such as passion and especially habit, in the production of these false beliefs. For this reason, far from distancing popular culture from learned culture, Buridan tries hard to understand how our beliefs are based on a set of determinations produced by a cultural and social context. It is the consideration of this context which allows us to identify and to correct our false beliefs.

⁴⁴ Aristoteles, *Ethica Nichomachea*, Bk III, c. 2, 1110b 31–1111a 2, in Aristotle, *Les Auctoritates*, ed. by Hamesse, p. 236.

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LIVING WITH UNCERTAINTY: REACTIONS TO ARISTOTLE'S *RHETORIC* IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

Rita Copeland

When Aristotle's *Rhetoric* came on the scene in the Latin West at the end of the thirteenth century, commentators were ill-prepared for its radical and revelatory treatment of the art. The authoritative translation by William of Moerbeke, produced about 1269, entered an environment that was not fully equipped to take it on. There was virtually no western scholarly tradition on the text to prepare readers for its actual character as a descriptive or prescriptive rhetoric. Frameworks for practical understanding or application of the *Rhetoric* as 'rhetoric' were insufficient. The impressive Arabic tradition on the text had treated it in a philosophical context as a logical science, a contribution to epistemology, psychology, and theories of cognition. Some key Arabic works on scientific classification, notably Al-Farabi's *De scientiis*, had become available in Latin during the previous century; these works offered views on rhetoric as a science, although they did not offer a preview of the contents of Aristotle's text. Philosophical writing of the mid-thirteenth century took up some of these Arabic ideas about rhetoric and the sciences in advance of the Moerbeke translation. This is reflected in some tentative Aristotelian approaches to rhetoric from the middle of the century, in the years around 1250.¹

¹ These ideas feature in the work of Albertus Magnus, who was inspired by Al-Ghazali's logic. But Gilbert Dahan sees the tendency as well in Robert Kilwardby's *De ortu scientiarum*. See Dahan, 'L'Entrée de la *Rhétorique* d'Aristote dans le monde latin', pp. 77–80.

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In its earliest incarnations in ancient Greece, before and during the time of Plato, the art of rhetoric was notorious for its disciplinary and moral slipperiness, for the way it seemed to invite a relativistic approach to knowledge and values. The Roman tradition of rhetoric, represented most importantly by Cicero, Quintilian, and ultimately (for its medieval legacy) Boethius's *De topicis differentiis* book 4, had imposed a structure of certainty on the disciplinary placement and even moral content of the art. Readers in the medieval West were schooled in the Ciceronian-Boethian rhetorical tradition, which in the Middle Ages directly inspired practical and theoretical approaches to poetics and prose composition, and which had forged obvious connections with grammar and dialectic as well as with civic and bureaucratic discourses, especially law and the *ars dictaminis*.² These links to pragmatic applications had ensured a moral usefulness for the art.

But unlike the well-known works of the Roman tradition, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* represented a new kind of authority for which academic readers were often unprepared. It is not a straightforward prescriptive handbook like the Ciceronian rhetorics and their late classical offshoots, the rhetorical compendia of the fourth and fifth centuries. Also unlike the Ciceronian works, Aristotle's text is not easy to understand. It is sometimes confusing in its organization and elaboration, and it is embedded in an Athenian legal practice and literary culture to which readers had only slight access. If on the one hand the work could be glossed (as it often was) with reference to better known texts in Aristotle's philosophical corpus, notably the *Ethics* and the logic of the *Organon*, it offered (and still offers) no summary definition of rhetoric that could replace the simple Ciceronian pronouncement that it is a branch of politics whose aim is to persuade by speech (*De inventione*, 1. 5. 6), or the equally direct Boethian statement that rhetoric treats hypotheses or particular questions (*De topicis differentiis*, book 4, PL 64, col. 1205D). The Latinized Arabic scholarship on the work provided a context for assimilating some (or some versions) of its doctrine, but the nearly naked text itself, in Moerbeke's literal translation, still posed many difficulties.

Aristotle's text is tricky because it unsettles rhetoric as it had long been understood through the Ciceronian-Roman tradition. Ciceronian theory had conferred a powerful and even sanitizing stability on rhetoric, thereby justifying the professional prestige of the Roman orator. By contrast, Aristotle treats rhetoric philosophically, although rhetoric for him is no more philosophy than is poetics (both may be measured against the truth value of demonstrative proof,

² On law, see Hohmann, 'Ciceronian Rhetoric and the Law'. The best complete resource on *dictamen* is Camargo, *Ars dictaminis, ars dictandi*.

which underlies genuine philosophical inquiry). Aristotle describes the state of the art and its methods, disciplinary relations, and social function. While he presents a systematic account of rhetoric (unlike those contemporary ‘writers of handbooks’ whom he derides), the systematic approach does not imply an elevation of rhetoric. The fact that rhetoric is an important social practice is sufficient reason to investigate its formal premises. Moreover, Aristotle does not register deep anxiety about the possible moral indeterminacy of rhetoric, nor about those issues that so exercised Plato as well as early Christian observers of the art. He discusses (in book 2, 1401a–02a) how to recognize the fallacious arguments of one’s opponents (e.g., making the weaker argument the stronger), a subject he treats at greater length in *Sophistical Refutations*; but in the *Rhetoric* this is not foregrounded in such a way as to define the whole of the art. Unlike Plato in the *Gorgias* and in the *Phaedrus*, Aristotle accepts that the rhetor will not be expert in all the fields that he has to argue. The speaker should be equipped with an understanding of human values, a popular ‘ethics’ which Aristotle supplies in his discussion of the topics appropriate to each of the three genres, but without the urgency towards knowing the good that he displays in the *Ethics*. Where rhetoric might intersect with sophistic practice, he is again surprisingly unfazed. Thus in dialectic, he says, sophistic argument is a deliberate falsification of the syllogism: in other words, the sophist is a kind of dialectician, one who wilfully perverts syllogistic reasoning. But in rhetoric, the term ‘rhetor’ applies to anyone who argues effectively, or both effectively and underhandedly (1355b). Even the definition of the art of rhetoric is open: it is the ability to see the available means of persuasion, not necessarily to succeed in persuading (1355b), a definition which (as noted above) Cicero duly reformulated and sharpened in *De inventione*.

Commentary by Giles of Rome

The earliest major response to the Moerbeke translation of the *Rhetoric* was the massive commentary by Giles of Rome, produced around 1272, and influential well into the sixteenth century. Giles availed himself of Arabic-Latin resources to understand the text and the scientific problems that it presented. This commentary has been studied extensively by Costantino Marmo and Ubaldo Staico for its contribution to the philosophy of language, its philosophical analysis of the passions, and its treatment of ethics.³ While

³ Staico, ‘Rhetorica e politica in Egidio Romano’. Some of Marmo’s work is cited below, but see also Marmo, “Hoc autem etsi potest tollerari...”.

some of their findings will be relevant to my inquiry, I want to focus here on some direct implications for the unsettling of conventional conceptions of the rhetorical art. The philosophical framework within which Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was received was the extended *Organon* from Greco-Syriac and Arabic traditions of classification, in which the *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* were appended to the other divisions of logic based on the six texts of the *Organon*: on this model, rhetoric and poetics were understood as the least reliable of the methods of logic, well below demonstration and probability.⁴ Alongside this model, and never dislodged in the Latin West, was the Ciceronian-Boethian tradition, in which rhetoric was classed as a part of civil science (*De inventione*) or at least allied to it (Boethius, *De topicis differentiis*, book 4). The standard Ciceronian model fit easily into established frameworks of the sciences such as the trivium and quadrivium, where rhetoric was understood as one of the *artes sermocinales* that will provide the verbal faculties of interpretation that assist higher understanding of 'natural' sciences or mathematical truths.⁵ Thus for example, in the middle of the thirteenth century and within the same academic milieu that embraced the extended *Organon*, a group of student 'revision exercises', recently brought to light by Claude Lafleur, could repeat the traditional model of the trivium as the *artes sermocinales*.⁶

Rhetorica assecutiva dialecticae est

In the famous opening sentence of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle says: 'Rhetoric is an *antistrophos* to dialectic' (1354a);⁷ *antistrophos* is usually translated in English as 'counterpart' or 'correlative'. Aristotle announces this as if it is self-evident: rhetoric, like dialectic, is a tool, neither belongs to a separately

⁴ The best introduction to this model derived from Alexandrian commentators is Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics*, pp. 17–51. The model was influential in some western philosophical circles, owing to its presence in the Al-Farabian *De scientiis* (translated by both Gundissalinus and Gerard of Cremona in the twelfth century), its use by Gundissalinus in his own *De divisione scientiarum*, and its dissemination in the first tractate of Albertus Magnus's commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*, and in Aquinas's preface to his commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*.

⁵ See the survey in Copeland and Sluiter, 'Classifications of Knowledge'; see also Dahan, 'L'Entrée de la *Rhétorique* d'Aristote dans le monde latin', pp. 64–76.

⁶ Lafleur, *Quatre introductions à la philosophie*, pp. 182, 260–62, 274, 321, 345.

⁷ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. by Kennedy, p. 28. All English translations from the *Rhetoric* will be from this text.

defined science, and both involve the kind of reasoning that ordinary people do every day — testing an argument or defending themselves. But for Giles of Rome, this statement would have posed interesting problems in the wake of various attempts, throughout the thirteenth century, to sort out the precise relationship between logic and rhetoric: were they different forms of ‘rational sciences’, different forms of ‘discourse science’ (*scientia sermocinalis*), opposed to each other in terms of their subjects, instruments, and aims (as for Ralph Brito: fl. 1296–1306 in Paris)?⁸ Or was rhetoric simply a ‘lesser sister’ of dialectic under the general rubric of ‘logic’ as a certain ‘discipline of thought’, which was Aquinas’s solution in the preface to his commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*?⁹ Moerbeke’s Latin translation of the opening sentence is: ‘Rhetorica *assecutiva* dialecticae est’.¹⁰ Giles takes this to mean that rhetoric ‘follows’ dialectic in the sense that it is both equal and different. For Giles, the radical difference between dialectic and rhetoric lies not in that one produces opinion based on certitude and the other merely belief (as Al-Farabi had said),¹¹ nor even in the commonplace distinction between the universal reasonings of dialectic and the particulars of rhetoric, but that rhetoric is essentially an appetitive movement of the intellect:

For the assent of belief through persuasive reasonings belongs to the intellect when it is by nature apt to be moved by appetite. An assent of knowledge or opinion, that is, to assent through demonstrative or probable reasonings, belongs to the intellect as it is by its nature apt to be moved by its own motion.¹²

The stronger form of proof (opinion) belongs to the intellect as it is moved by its own motion. Rhetorical assent is thus ‘a certain kind of “suspicion”’. *Suspicio*

⁸ Marmo, ‘Significance in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*’, p. 186.

⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio libri posteriorum*, ed. by Gauthier, p. 1; translated in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, pp. 787–91; the phrase ‘discipline of thought’ is from Marmo, ‘Significance in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*’, p. 167.

¹⁰ *Rhetorica: Translatio anonyma*, ed. by Schneider, p. 159.

¹¹ Al-Farabi, *Didascalica*, ed. by Langhade and Grignaschi, pp. 152–56.

¹² ‘Nam assensus credulitatis per rationes persuasivas competit intellectui secundum quod [est] aptus natus moveri ab appetitu. Assensus vero scientificus et opinativus sive assentire per propositiones demonstrativas et probabiles competit intellectui ut est aptus natus moveri secundum motum proprium’. Giles of Rome, *Commentaria in rhetoricam Aristotelis*, fol. 1rb; translated in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, p. 799 (with minor change). On this idea, see Marmo, ‘Significance in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*’, p. 188.

is not as marked a term as we might think, having been used by Aquinas as a stronger synonym for *praesumptio*,¹³ but it still carries the sense of a weak form of certitude. My point here is that Aristotle's pronouncement on the correspondence between dialectic and rhetoric throws the commentator into considerable turmoil (the explication of this sentence takes up some five hundred lines in the Venice 1515 print), because it upsets received notions of rhetoric's relation to the other logical methods that were based on the principles of the extended *Organon* established in the West before Aristotle's *Rhetoric* itself was properly known. Thus it does not confirm previous understandings either of rhetoric's logical inferiority or its subalternation to dialectic. The 'equality' or 'correlation' of rhetoric to dialectic has to be found, most laboriously and I think unsatisfyingly, in another kind of cognitive process, that is, the weaker certitude of belief, which is an appetitive claim on the intellect.

A Dialectic Applied to Civil Affairs

What was also problematic to Giles was Aristotle's seeming turnabout in allying rhetoric not only with dialectic but with ethics:

Since proofs come about through these three means (*ethos, pathos, logos*), it is clear that to grasp an understanding of them is the function of one who can form syllogisms, and be observant about characters and virtues and about emotions [...]. The result is that rhetoric is a certain kind of offshoot (*paraphues*) of dialectic and of ethics, which it is just to call politics' (1356a).¹⁴

In the translation of Moerbeke:

Quoniam autem persuasiones per hec sunt, manifestum quod hec tria est accipere eius qui sillogizare potest et considerare que circa mores et virtutes et tertio que circa passiones [...] quare accidit rethoricam velut adnatam partem quandam dialectice [*sic*] esse et negotii quod circa mores, quod iustum est appellare politicum.¹⁵

¹³ See Marmo, 'Significance in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*', p. 168. The term *praesumptio* also appears earlier in Albertus Magnus's commentary on the *Posterior Analytics*, in his exposition of the logical sciences influenced by Arab scholarship: 'Putabiles autem sunt, quae faciunt putare aliquid quamvis sit non ita, quia potest esse oppositum [...] et istae faciunt praesumptiones rethoricas', tractate 1. 2, Albertus Magnus, *Opera omnia II*, ed. by Borgnet, pp. 6–7.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. by Kennedy, p. 39.

¹⁵ *Rhetorica: Translatio anonyma*, ed. by Schneider, p. 164, ll. 13–19.

This claim that rhetoric is both a branch of both dialectic and ethics ('negotii quod circa mores') is obviously troublesome from the perspective of the opening pronouncement of the text, in which rhetoric is linked with dialectic because it has no determinate subject matter (such as politics or ethics). The Ciceronian tradition had stabilized this difficulty by defining oratorical ability decisively as a branch of politics, *civilis scientia* (*De inventione*, 1. 5. 6), so that it was not a method at large, but rather a civic practice necessary to all other civic affairs. The Ciceronian definition had become a cliché by the twelfth century. But this ruling assumption is withdrawn the moment one enters the precincts of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and then just as suddenly restored (with qualification) a few paragraphs later. Giles's response is characteristic: perhaps he fudges it, but in a way that was productive for the rest of his own writing career. Giles comments:

From what was said before [Aristotle] concludes that rhetoric is a kind of dialectic applicable to civic affairs [...]. It follows that the Philosopher thinks that rhetoric is a part of dialectic applicable to civil morals.¹⁶

This seems to harmonize the Ciceronian definition, 'the art of speaking well in civic affairs', with Aristotle's authoritative scientific approach. But in fact it leaves us still with a method-at-large ('a kind of dialectic') whose nature is to have no inherent subject matter, but which is now *applicable* to civic morals, as if this is the particular use of rhetoric: on Giles's further explanation:

Rhetoric is a particular kind of ratiocinative art, a particular kind of dialectic; it is an act of reason about particular things. Note that the particular things to which rhetorical reasonings are applied are civil affairs, and so it is that rhetoric concerns morals and political affairs [...].¹⁷

The particularities with which rhetoric — which started out having no inherent subject matter — is concerned have been steadily narrowed down from any kind of particulars to a specific kind of particular, politics.

¹⁶ 'Concludit ex habitis rhetoricam esse quandam dialecticam applicabilem ad civile negotium [...]. Vult ergo philosophus quod ex habitis sequatur rhetoricam esse partem dialectice applicabilem ad mores civiles.' Giles of Rome, *Commentaria in rhetoricam Aristotelis*, 7rb; translated in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, p. 805.

¹⁷ 'Nam circa actum rationis, circa particulares res, rhetorica est quedam particularis ars ratiocinativa, sive quedam particularis dialectica. Ex quo nota quod res ille particulares ad quas applicantur rationes rhetorice sunt opera civilia, et hoc est rhetoricum esse circa mores et circa negotium politicum [...].' Giles of Rome, *Commentaria in rhetoricam Aristotelis*, 7rb; translated in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, p. 806.

These questions lead Giles to attempt to lay out as pointedly as possible how dialectic and rhetoric differ. While trying to keep intact the definition of rhetoric as a counterpart of dialectic, or perhaps keeping in mind how his own teacher Aquinas had earlier solved the problem by placing dialectic and rhetoric together as 'inventive' forms of logic, Giles offers a guideline for distinguishing the realms of the two methods, even while acknowledging that the methods themselves are fairly close:

Let us lay out the difference between opinion and belief, or between dialectic and rhetoric, in very precise terms. As we have seen, the intellect assents to the persuasions of rhetoric as it is apt to be moved by the appetite; it believes the probable arguments of dialectic as it is moved according to its own movement. It follows that there is a fivefold difference between rhetoric and dialectic. First, the rhetorician descends more into moral matter, and the dialectician into speculative matter. Second, it behoves the rhetorician, but not the dialectician, to consider the passions. Third, the audience and judge of rhetorical discourse is simple and unsophisticated, whereas the audience of dialectical discourse ought to be clever and subtle. Fourth, the instruments of rhetoric are the enthymeme and the example; the instruments of dialectic are the syllogism and induction. Fifth, as mentioned above, rhetorical persuasion is more concerned with particular matters, while dialectical proof is concerned more with universal matters. We can also give a sixth difference, which is that even though both dialectic and rhetoric use topics of argument, the two arts do not understand topics in the same way [...].¹⁸

In this, probably the best known passage from his long commentary, Giles seems to have resolved some of the troubling issues about rhetoric's status by developing in some detail the methodological distinctions that were familiar

¹⁸ 'Est ergo signanter notandum differentiam inter opinionem et fidem, sive inter dialecticam et rhetoricam. Nam ex hoc ergo intellectus assentit persuasionibus rhetoricis ut est aptus natus moveri ab appetitu; probationibus vero dialecticis credit, ut movetur secundum modum proprium. Sequitur quincuplex differentiam inter rhetoricam et dialecticam. Prima est: quod rhetor magis descendit in materiam moralem, et dialecticus magis in speculativam. Secunda, quod spectat ad rhetorem determinare de passionibus, non autem ad dialecticum. Tertia est, quod iudex locutionis rhetoricae et eius auditor est simplex et grossus. Auditor vero locutionis dialecticae debet esse ingeniosus et subtilis. Quarta est quod instrumenta rhetoricae sunt enthymema et exemplum, dialecticae vero syllogismus et inductio. Quinta est, quam supra fuit tacta, videlicet quia persuasio rhetorica magis est circa singularia, dialectica vero probatio magis est circa universalia. Posset etiam sexta assignari, quia licet tam dialectica quam rhetorica utatur locis; loci tamen hic et ibi non sumuntur eodem modo [...]'. Giles of Rome, *Commentaria in rhetoricam Aristotelis*, 2ra; translated in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, pp. 799–800.

from Boethius's *De topicis differentiis*, in which rhetoric is associated with the hypothesis, dialectic with the thesis.

But the actual content of rhetoric, along with the implications of Aristotle's opening assertion, continued to haunt exercises in delineating the sciences. To contextualize the difficulty that Giles had with Aristotle's pronouncements, we can look at a work that Giles wrote sometime after finishing his *Rhetoric* commentary, and surely before he embarked on his most influential work, the *De regimine principum*. This is a little treatise called *De differentia rhetoricae, ethicae, et politicae*. In this treatise, Giles returns to the problems that emerged from the *Rhetoric* and tries to impose further order on them by *choosing* between Aristotle and Cicero:

Tully apparently classified rhetoric under politics; however, if this were so, there would be some doubt about how it differs from politics. But since rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic and is more dialectic than politics, we can establish the difference between them.

Now ethics and politics are specific sciences of a determinate genus. Their concern is human actions, in that this is the specific matter that they treat. This is not the case with rhetoric; rather, as it says in the first book of the *Rhetoric*, 'Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic.' Both rhetoric and dialectic deal in those sorts of things that are, in a way, commonly known, not in any determinate knowledge. But if we assert this (and I believe it is correct to assert it), there is a certain ambiguity that emerges: for rhetoric seems to be somewhere in between the moral and the rational sciences. It seems to be composed of both fields, dialectic and politics. For, as it says in the first book of the *Rhetoric*, it falls to rhetoric, as if by its natural lot, to be as if it were a part of dialectic and of that field that concerns moral behaviour.¹⁹ Thus if rhetoric pertains to these two fields, it is more a kind of dialectic than a kind of politics, and we must give more credence to the Philosopher, who places it under dialectic, than to Tully, who seems to classify it under politics.

Let us note that a science is named for the subject matter whose knowledge it teaches; and since rhetoric teaches knowledge of certain common principles, and does not directly teach a knowledge of moral affairs, it is therefore said to be of an indeterminate genus, and is said to be a certain kind of dialectic, and not a certain kind of politics [...].

So it is that rhetoric brings a consideration of common principles to moral affairs. But through these common principles it does not have a direct knowledge of moral affairs. Rhetoric is not properly classed under politics, because it does not directly

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1356a 25–35, 1359b 10.

teach the knowledge of morals; rather it is properly a branch of dialectic, because it directly teaches a knowledge of certain common principles, as the first book of the *Rhetoric* says.²⁰

I take this explanation as a move to clear the stage for ethics and politics, as Giles proceeds to the rest of his argument, perhaps as prolegomenon to *De regimine*. It is a clarification of his earlier argument, but one which deprives rhetoric of any direct knowledge of those particulars to which it is applied. In choosing Aristotle over Cicero, however, he has further ambiguated rhetoric's status by distancing rhetoric even further from its involvement in civic morals: its 'common principles' (which earlier had applied to the particulars of civic morals) now give no direct knowledge of civic morals. I venture the suggestion that as Giles approached his most ambitious project, the *De regimine principum* and its exposition of morals in the real public sphere, he realized that the definition of rhetoric that he had tried out in the Aristotle commentary, 'a kind of dialectic applicable to civic affairs', threatened to muddy the clear and urgent definitions of ethics that he had now to undertake, and thus that eloquence had to be understood as an instrument, but not a substantive part, of statecraft.

²⁰ 'Tullius enim videtur rethoricam sub politica collocasse; quod, si hoc esset, forte dubium haberet quomodo ab ea differet. Sed, cum rethorica sit assecutiva dyalectice et magis sit dyalectica quam politica, potest inter eas talis differentia assignari.

Nam ethica et politica sunt scientie speciales et sunt determinati generis. Circumcurnunt, enim, actus humanos, tanquam specialem materiam circa quam versantur. Rethorica autem non sic; sed, ut dicitur primo Rethoricorum: 'rethorica est assecutiva dyalectice'. Ambe, enim, sunt de talibus que communiter quodammodo est cognoscere, et nullius scientie determinate. Sed, si sic dicimus, quod credimus bene dicendum, consurgit quedam dubitatio; nam rethorica videtur quasi media inter scientias morales et rationales; videtur enim composita ex utroque negotio, videlicet, dyalectico et politico. Nam, ut dicitur primo Rethoricorum, contingit rethoricam, velut ad natam partem, quandam dyalectice esse et negotii quod est circa mores. Si ergo hec duo comprehendit rethorica, quare magis est quedam dyalectica quam quedam politica et quare magis assentiendum est Philosopho qui collocat eam sub dyalectica, quam Tullio, qui videtur eam collocasse sub politica.

Dicendum quod scientia denominatur ab eo cuius notitiam tradat; et, quia rethorica tradit notitiam quorundam communium, et non directe tradite notitiam moralis negotii, ideo dicitur esse indeterminati generis et esse quedam dyalectica, et non dicitur esse quedam politica [...].

Sic et rethorica considerat quedam communia ad morale negotium; tamen, per illa communia, non directe habetur notitia moralis negotii. Rethorica non est proprie sub politica, quia directe non tradit notitiam moralium, sed proprie est quedam dyalectica, quia directe tradit notitiam quorundam communium, ut declarari habet primo Rethoricorum'. Giles of Rome, *De differentia rethoricae, ethicae et politicae*, ed. by Bruni, pp. 5–7. I have discussed this passage in greater detail in Copeland, 'Ancient Sophistic and Medieval Rhetoric'.

Stabilizing Indeterminacy: The Example of ‘pistis’, ‘ethos’, and the ‘vir bonus dicendi peritus’ in William of Moerbeke and Giles of Rome

We can look to one further moment in Giles’s commentary which, although it is of less global consequence than the previous considerations, is still extremely revealing about the desire to manage the indeterminacy that Aristotle accepts as part of rhetorical practice. Aristotle’s threefold distinction among kinds of proof — through *logos* or the reasoning, through *ethos* or the character of the speaker, and through *pathos* or emotional appeal, was new to western readers; even the Latinized Arabic tradition had not quite grasped the key principles that underlie Aristotle’s exposition. Of *ethos* Aristotle says:

There is persuasion through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence [...]. And this should result from the speech, not from a previous opinion that the speaker is a certain kind of person [1356a].²¹

George Kennedy’s explanation is most helpful here: ‘Aristotle does not include in rhetorical *ethos* the authority that a speaker may possess due to his position [...] or anything except what is actually contained in the speech and the character it reveals [...]. One practical reason for stressing character as revealed within the speech was that the Greek law required defendants to speak on their own behalf, and they were often lacking in external authority. They could commission a speech from a logographer and then memorize it for delivery in court.’²² In other words, the audience should believe and trust the speaker, not for who he is, but for how he conveys (a relevant form of) character through the speech. For Aristotle this is not morally indeterminate; it is both the formal principle of *pistis* through *ethos*, and a fact of Athenian public life.

But the notion that character could be revealed through the speech alone seems to have worried the Roman rhetoricians, who were keen to impose a moral stability on rhetoric, perhaps lest their practice of the art be tainted by association with the perceived excesses of Greek sophistic and its supposed amorality. Quintilian was most outspoken about this, reiterating what was already a proverbial definition of the orator as ‘*vir bonus dicendi peritus*’, a *good* man skilled in speaking (*Institutio oratoria*, 12. 1. 1). This is a theme that runs through the Roman tradition at greater or lesser levels of explicitness.

²¹ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. by Kennedy, p. 38.

²² Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. by Kennedy, p. 38, note.

The Moerbeke translation of the passage on *ethos* quoted above makes a curious change, reversing Aristotle's meaning:

This should come about, not through the speech, but rather because the speaker is already considered to be a certain kind of person.²³

It is possible, of course, that this misapprehension was a result of corrupt transmission of Aristotle's text; but the earlier Latin translation of the *Rhetoric* from the Greek, known as the Anonymous Vetus (from about the 1250s) rendered it correctly, so it is not clear why Moerbeke did not see the point.²⁴ My hypothesis is that the Ciceronian-Quintilianic tradition of the speaker's personal and necessary *auctoritas* was so ingrained in Christian-Latin culture that Aristotle's point would not be comprehensible on its own terms, and therefore would need to be adjusted to make sense of it. And it is indeed on these very terms that Giles offers his own commentary:

He states the case, that is that willingness to believe should not be effected through the speech, but through opinion about the character of the speaker [...] our willingness to believe does not come from the speech [...] but from the speaker whom we believe to be of a certain character [...] In fact one should say that good character or worthiness is the principal tool of belief. It is as if he says that in the act of speaking itself, belief relies more on enthymemes and reasonings; however, good character should have the principal force in generating belief on the part of the audience.²⁵

Here, through William of Moerbeke's revision of the passage, Giles produces an intelligible and morally certain explanation of *auctoritas*, silently passing over any evidence that might have suggested an alternative explanation, and enshrining Aristotelian *ethos* in the familiar terms of Roman-Christian *auctoritas*.

²³ 'Oportet autem et hoc accidere non per orationem, sed propter preopinari qualem quendam esse dicentem.' *Rhetorica: Translatio anonyma*, ed. by Schneider, p. 164, ll. 1–2.

²⁴ For further references, see *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, pp. 802–03.

²⁵ 'Dat causam dicti dicens hic, id est credulitatem non accidere per orationem sed propter opinari qualem quendam dicentem esse natura [...] non erit talis credulitas per orationem [...] sed propter dicentem quem credimus qualem quondam [...] ut est dicere mos bonus sive modestia principalissimam habent fidem. Et dicit fere quod per se loquendo fides magis inititur et in enthymematibus et rationibus que autem modestia et principalitem habeat ad generandam fidem, hoc est ex parte credentium.' Giles of Rome, *Commentaria in rhetoricam Aristotelis*, 6vb–7ra; translated in *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric*, ed. by Copeland and Sluiter, p. 803.

The Difficulties of Treating Rhetoric as a 'Science': Jean Buridan

Up through the twelfth century, medieval schoolmen found a place for rhetoric, understood in its Ciceronian-Boethian terms, among the arts of language (*artes sermocinales*) which might be more or less co-extensive with the trivium. In this respect, rhetoric was seen as an auxiliary science; its participation in politics, even where that might be noted (e.g., the oft-repeated 'rhetoric is an art of speaking well on civil matters'), was subordinated to its primary definition, for classification purposes, as an art of eloquence and thus of language study along with grammar and dialectic. But the incorporation of the extended *Organon* model during the thirteenth century also began to propel rhetoric into a new and more important status, as a science under the disciplinary umbrella of logic writ large ('rational sciences'). We have already seen how Giles has to negotiate the problem of rhetoric's potential subordination to dialectic, something which — even if found in Aristotle's own text — could not readily be reconciled with a now-accepted framework that was also seen to be Aristotle's intention: the extended *Organon* in which rhetoric now had a distinctive role. Thus we also see Giles choosing an Aristotelian determination (rhetoric is more dialectic than ethics) over the authority of Cicero, who places rhetoric on the side of politics.

These were questions that seemed to need to be adjusted with every generation of commentators. Here I will look briefly at how some aspects of these problems are handled in Jean Buridan's *Questions on the Rhetoric* (from the middle of the fourteenth century).²⁶ For Buridan, as for Giles of Rome, rhetoric would have offered a test case for a central epistemological concern, as Christophe Grellard's essay in this volume considers in some depth: the formation of opinion based on probable reasoning and the mechanisms through which one makes assent. Rhetoric could bring these problems to the foreground because of the complex history of its scientific classification.

The elevation of rhetoric to a scientific status as a 'rational science' seems to have posed as much of a problem as a solution to the difficulties of placing rhetoric. As Joel Biard has shown, Buridan needed to resolve a crux: if rhetoric is indeed a science, it has to proceed through demonstrations involving universal truths (as affirmed in the *Posterior Analytics*), or it must be a 'speculative dis-

²⁶ All quotations from the *Questiones in rhetoricam Aristotelis* will be from the unpublished transcription by Bernadette Preben-Hansen, to whom I am grateful for allowing me to cite her text. My thanks also to Christophe Grellard for providing me with a copy of it.

position' (as 'prudentia' is defined in book 6 of the *Ethics*).²⁷ But even here the Ciceronian tradition added confusion. Rhetoric's only worldly embodiment was as a technique, an art of eloquence, for which the prescriptive manuals based on the Ciceronian texts gave solid, programmatic advice. Such technical orientation gave little scope to the universal concepts of demonstrative science (and probably obviated any worry about them). On the other hand, the very 'non-teachability' of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* surely exacerbated the problem. As I have already suggested, the *Rhetoric* is hardly a preceptive, compositional manual. Where the *Rhetoric* had a practical impact, this was in articulating new interests in the emotions and in psychology, or in discovering ethical justifications for figurative discourse (as in Giles's *De regimine principum*). Thus Aristotle seemed to present a notion of rhetoric that could fit the requisite of a 'science': teaching general principles. But the more familiar tradition of rhetorical teaching was concerned with technical rules for specific occasions. Rhetoric could be divided — as it had been during the thirteenth century — into *utens* (practical technique) and *docens* (teaching general scientific principles), and Buridan follows this (*rhetorica usualis* and *rhetorica doctrinalis*).²⁸

But this distinction is not adequate for Buridan. If *scientia* is to be understood in absolute demonstrative terms, rhetoric cannot be a science in the pure sense. The objects of rhetoric are persuasions and actions (*persuasibilia* and *agibilia*) not knowledge in an absolute sense (*scibilia*).²⁹ But how far can the measure of 'universal concepts' be stretched? Buridan does try to supply another rationale for rhetoric's scientificity, but not with regard to its role as a 'rational science'. Instead he looks to the other side of rhetoric, its involvement in civil questions, that perspective which Giles of Rome had put aside in favour of Aristotle's pronouncement 'rhetorica assecutiva dialecticae est'. According to Buridan, rhetoric engages law on two levels: there is law in a universal sense, *ius* (that which is right, or those things that a universal duty imposes), and law at its singular instantiation, *factum*, the fact or matter which needs to be judged according to a universal standard:

²⁷ *Questiones in rhetoricam Aristotelis*, 1. 1. and see Biard, 'Science et rhétorique dans les *Questions sur la Rhétorique*', pp. 143–45.

²⁸ *Questiones in rhetoricam Aristotelis*, 1. 1, 1. 15. Earlier uses of this distinction (in commentaries on Boethius's *De topicis differentiis*) are discussed in Fredborg, 'Buridan's *Quaestiones super rhetoricam Aristotelis*'.

²⁹ *Questiones in rhetoricam Aristotelis*, 1. 1, 1. 10, 1. 15; Biard, 'Science et rhétorique dans les *Questions sur la Rhétorique*', p. 145.

Some matters are 'of law'; others 'of fact' concern human actions such as 'that one hit this one' and 'this one was a cleric' and that '[it happened] in this place on this day, at this hour', and other such questions. We call 'of law' all universal propositions concerning human *agibilia* which are always true or true in most cases. Possible propositions which are 'of law' are all to be determined by law (as far as concerns it in itself). Any case whatsoever may be proposed to a legislator who may determine what is tenable in every such case. But from our [Buridan's] point of view this is inadequate, for owing to the deficiency of our intellect, which cannot perceive all the differences of possible cases, it is not possible that everything which is said to be 'of law' may be determined by law. As for those things said to be 'of fact', it is impossible that they be determined by law, since the determination of law resides in universals, but the investigation of the truth of such laws can only proceed according to possibility, either through testimony or through oaths or through violent coercion.³⁰

Rhetoric as the facilitator of legal judgement thus seems to operate within two concentric spheres, one that formulates legal precept along universal lines, and one that applies such precept to singular cases. But even this, in turn, is found to be inadequate. The *habitus* of rhetoric is not itself, it is not complete or perfected, unless it is engaged at the level of singular affairs:

But I say that such a rhetoric is not perfect absolutely nor sufficient for proper and firm action.³¹

On the one hand, this can be read as a most nuanced solution. But it also speaks to the great difficulty that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* presented. The powerful gravitational pull of the extended *Organon* seemed to call for the elevation of rhetoric to some kind of scientific status; and, I suggest, the *Rhetoric* itself,

³⁰ 'quedam sunt iuris, alia facti sunt omnes propositiones singulares circa agibilia humana, ut quod iste percussit illum, et quod ille erat clericus, et quod in hac ecclesia, et quod illo die uel illa hora, et sic de aliis. Iuris dicuntur omnes propositiones uniuersales circa agibilia humana uere semper uel in plurimis. Propositiones autem que sunt iuris possibles sunt omnes lege determinari quantum est de se. Quicumque enim casus legislatori proponeretur, ipse determinaret quid in omni tali casu est tenendum, sed ex parte nostra obest, nam propter debilitatem nostri intellectus, qui non potest omnes differentias casuum possibilium perspicere, non est possibile quod omnia que iuris uocantur <?> lege determinantur. Ea que facti dicuntur, impossibile est etiam quod lege determinantur, cum legis determinatio sistat in uniuersalibus, sed talium inquisitio ueritatis fit aliquando ad possibile, aut per testes, aut per iuramenta, aut etiam per coactiones uiolentas'. *Questiones in rhetoricam Aristotelis*, 1. 3; Biard, 'Science et rhétorique dans les *Questions sur la Rhétorique*', p. 146.

³¹ 'Sed dico quod rhetorica talis non est perfecta simpliciter nec sufficiens ad recte et firmiter operandum'. *Questiones in rhetoricam Aristotelis*, 1. 15; see Biard, 'Science et rhétorique dans les *Questions sur la Rhétorique*', pp. 149–50.

scientific rather than pragmatic in its outlook, would have seemed to intensify that call. This is what we see in Giles of Rome's insistence that rhetoric is more logic than it is politics.

Conclusions

What was the effect on the ground of all this theorizing between one pole and another? The radical and unsettling effects of the exposure to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* can also be traced in the manuscript tradition. Here, paradoxically, given the initial enthusiasm for accepting the *Rhetoric* as a contribution to *scientia rationalis*, as a counterpart of dialectic, William of Moerbeke's translation did not travel with works on dialectic, but rather and overwhelmingly, with Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics*.³² In omnibus collections it might be found with a variety of Aristotelian texts (e.g., *Metaphysics*), but there too in the company of one or more of the moral works. In other words, no matter how vigorously Giles argued for what he saw as the Aristotelian perspective on rhetoric's scientific domain, and however strongly he rejected Cicero's claim to viewing rhetoric as a part of politics; and no matter how much Buridan and others may have struggled to distinguish between *docens* and *utens* and isolate the 'scientific' dimensions of rhetoric, readers and compilers contextualized the *Rhetoric* as a work that pertained to ethics, prudence, and politics.³³ Indeed the *Rhetoric* is not found in collections specifically or primarily of logical works.

Thus the placing of rhetoric under logic may have claimed attention at a theoretical level, but this does not seem to reflect actual readerly interest in the work. It is difficult to know whether this is because the force of the more familiar Ciceronian tradition was still very strong, or because Aristotle's own alliance of rhetoric with ethics and politics itself exerted an influence. The kind of interest generated in the work at the ground level can suggest application to practical affairs: notably we find the *Rhetoric* or propositions extracted from it

³² Briggs, 'Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in the Later Medieval Universities'; Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, pp. 89–101.

³³ Evancio Beltrán has tentatively suggested that the Averroist John of Jandun (1285–1328), who also left a commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, was drawn to the subject because of his own scepticism. He would have found in Aristotle's text an affirmation of his own resistance to dogmatism and ideology: if neither faith nor reason offer absolute certainty, rhetoric might offer a way of knowing what is best in each case, and wise and experienced orators are more reliable than mere sophists. See Beltrán, 'Les *Questions sur la rhétorique d'Aristote* de Jean de Jandun', pp. 166–67.

in collections that are connected with preaching or the education of preachers.³⁴ Whatever the historical reasons, the work entered into its own indeterminate realm, on a continuum from logic to ethics, where philosophers tried to salvage its prestige as a contribution to rational science, and general readers accepted it without contradiction as an addendum to ethics and politics. However readers might have pondered the paradox of rhetoric as a logic attached to civil affairs, they were apparently willing to live with this scientific uncertainty, as the vast distribution of the *Rhetoric* and its incorporation into pastoral and political applications attests.

³⁴ Also see Copeland, 'Pathos and Pastoralism'.

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UNCERTAINTY IN THE STUDY OF THE BIBLE

Lesley Smith

Introduction

Of all the things that were certain in the Middle Ages, surely the most dependable and unquestioned was the Bible? Not simply a text, it was *the* text; not just an authority but *the* authority, the Bible was the Word of God. Its stories, images, ideas, and language permeated medieval life. The essential *meaning* of the Bible had been debated, decided, and set out as the doctrine of the Church established by the early Councils in the fourth and fifth centuries. From then on, study of the Bible by individual scholars and in monasteries was intended to provide the foundation for personal and institutional faith. But with the advent of the new and fashionable secular (that is, clerical but not monastic) schools of the late eleventh/early twelfth centuries, the Bible became part of a curriculum, as well as a text for contemplation. The intention of the schools was to question everything. They were accused of reducing matters of faith to problems in logic, disregarding the special status of the biblical text.¹ In this essay, I shall consider whether this change in context, from monastery to classroom, led to a change in perception of the certainty of biblical study — of the security of the text and its meaning. In a short space, I cannot give comprehensive coverage of every aspect of the subject, so I offer a series of snapshots of areas where uncertainty seems to have been possible. Nevertheless, from these glimpsed illustra-

¹ For a history of the early schools see Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*; essays in Benson and Constable, eds, *Renaissance and Renewal*; Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*; Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*; and Giraud, 'Per verba magistri'.

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tions we may be able to draw some conclusions about the legitimate place of uncertainty, even in the study of the Bible.

Uncertainty about the Biblical Text

We begin with uncertainty about the biblical text itself. Contrary to the popular view that textual criticism is a phenomenon of the Renaissance, questions about the ‘best’ text of the Bible for Christians go back at least as far as Jerome, whose letters speak of the problems of translation and interpretation encountered in working towards a definitive version.² Jerome tried to improve the biblical texts he had by translating from Hebrew and Greek originals. For instance, he made three versions of the Psalms, two of which — the Gallican from the Greek hexapla text and the Hebraic from the Hebrew — were known to medieval scholars.³ Although the ubiquitous Latin Vulgate text incorporated the Gallican Psalter translation, twelfth- and thirteenth-century Bible manuscripts often gave *both* texts — Gallican and Hebraic — side by side (Fig. 1. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. E. inf. 2, fol. 2^r). Although position on the page, size of script, and decoration all gave primacy to the Gallican version, nonetheless both translations were available and there was no insistence on a single Psalms text. Indeed, the fact that there was more than one version in circulation was one of the reasons that manuscripts of the Vulgate text could be so inaccurate.⁴

Teachers at the new secular schools were by no means the first to attempt to revise the biblical text, but the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries saw a new concern to recover the original Vulgate readings.⁵ Stephen Langton noted possible amendments to the text in his lectures to students;⁶ but it was

² Jerome, *Epistulae*, ed. by Hilberg, nos 20, 26, 28, 53, 57, 106, 112.

³ Sparks, ‘Jerome as Biblical Scholar’; Kelly, *Jerome*; Brown, *Vir trilinguis*; Kieffer, ‘Jerome: His Exegesis and Hermeneutics’.

⁴ Berger, *Histoire de la Vulgate*; Glunz, *The Vulgate in England from Alcuin to Roger Bacon*; Loewe, ‘The Medieval History of the Latin Vulgate’.

⁵ The Carolingian scholars Alcuin and Theodulf of Orleans both attempted to correct and standardize the text, as did the twelfth-century Cistercians Stephen Harding and Nicholas Maniacoria: see Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, pp. 79–81. Stephen Harding even took advice on the biblical text from Jews: Goodwin, ‘Take Hold of the Robe of a Jew’, p. 93, and see the section on Jewish authority, below. For biblical correction in general see Linde, *How to Correct the Sacra scriptura*.

⁶ Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, p. 220.

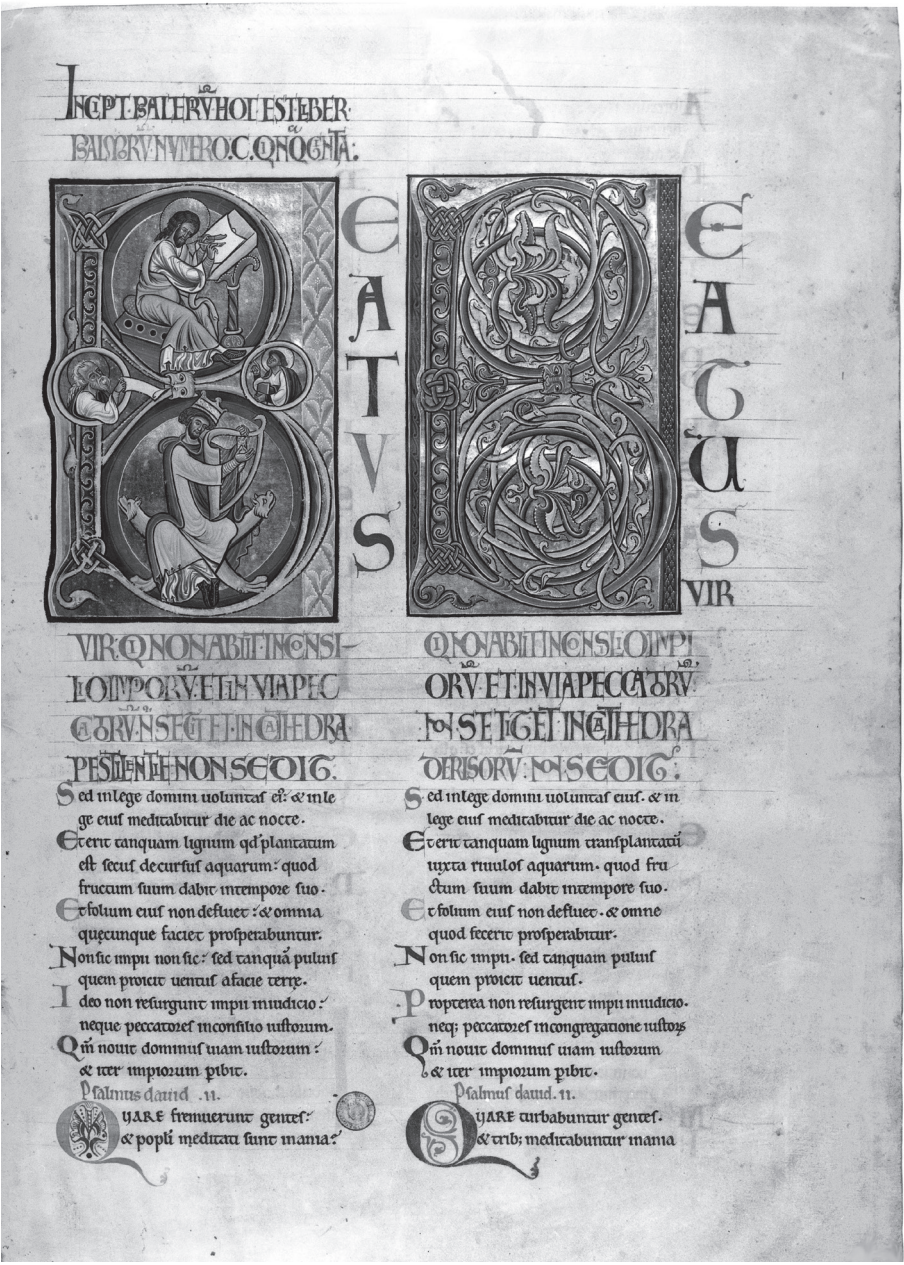


Figure 1. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. E. inf. 2, fol. 2r:
 Beginning of the Psalter from a Bible made in Winchester, second half of 12th c.
 Image by permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

William of Sens, working for the Dominicans at Paris, who first systematized the differences into what was known as a *correctorium*.⁷ The 1236 Dominican General Chapter ordered all Dominican houses to correct their Bibles according to its readings.⁸ More *correctoria* followed, of which the most famous was made by the Dominican Hugh of St Cher and a team of friars in the 1250s. Hugh tells us that he looked for textual variants and better readings by going back to the oldest Bibles he could find; by looking at texts in the original Greek and Hebrew; and by comparing readings in the commentaries of the Fathers.⁹ *Correctoria* were not always simple lists of what should and should not be in the text; some are much more like a modern *apparatus criticus*: they use marginal notes to a particular lemma (for example, 'the modern texts have this but the hebrew and ancient texts do not', 'the hebrew and ancient texts do not have *et* here', or 'the hebrew text reads *vincta* here') to generate a dialogue between the text and the margins.¹⁰

We know of six different *correctoria* texts in existence at the end of the thirteenth century, and there may have been more. The one made by the Franciscan William de la Mare, in the last third of the thirteenth century, specifically states that the Vulgate text should *not* be altered to accommodate Hebrew readings: William recognizes a difference between, on the one hand, producing a text which incorporated comparative readings of texts in original languages and, on the other, presenting the best Vulgate text that might be recovered, whatever its failings *vis-à-vis* the Hebrew or Greek originals.¹¹

We can see scholars working with more than one text simultaneously in manuscripts of the biblical Gloss (the *Glossa*, or later, the *Glossa ordinaria*). The Gloss contains the entire text of scripture, set apart from, but surrounded by, extracts from (mostly) patristic and Carolingian commentaries. From the middle of the twelfth century onwards, the Gloss was the standard way that

⁷ Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, pp. 331–37; Light, 'Versions et révisions du texte biblique'; Dahan, 'La Critique textuelle dans les correctoires de la Bible du XIII^e siècle', pp. 365–92; Dahan, *Les Intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs*, pp. 272–85; Mulchahey, 'First the Bow is Bent in Study...', ch. 7.

⁸ 'Volumus et mandamus ut secundum correctionem [...] biblie alie ordinis corrigantur et punctetur', *Acta capitulorum provincialium*, ed. by Douais, I, p. 9.

⁹ Hugh's introduction to his *correctio biblie* is given in Dahan, 'La Critique textuelle dans les correctoires de la Bible du XIII^e siècle', pp. 386–87.

¹⁰ See Dahan, *Les Intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs*, pp. 277–78; Rouse and Rouse, *Manuscripts and their Makers*, I, p. 84.

¹¹ Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, pp. 335–36.

students read the Bible: they did not study from a 'plain' Bible text; they used the text *and* its commentaries, as presented in the Gloss.¹² The Bible version the Gloss uses is the Vulgate, as it was for most of the commentators from which the surrounding extracts are drawn. However, that was not true for commentators working in Greek, such as Origen and Hesychius. They used the Septuagint text — a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, known in the West through a Latin translation known as the *Vetus Latina*.

Figure 2 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct. D. 3. 12, fol. 11^r) shows part of the Gloss on Leviticus chapter 4, a discussion of which parts of which animals can be burnt as sacrifices in the Temple. The biblical text, in the central column, is the Vulgate version. At chapter 4 verse 11 (lines 8–11 in the central column of Fig. 2), the Vulgate text reads: 'Pellem vero et omnes carnes, cum capite et pedibus et intestinos et fimo, et reliquo corpore [...]' ('But the skin and all the flesh with the head and the feet and the bowels and the dung, and the rest of the body [...]'); but the interlinear gloss at this point gives the reading according to the Latin translation of the Septuagint version — signalled by 'LXX', which refers to the supposed seventy-two translators which give the Septuagint its name. This text substitutes 'ventre et stercore' for 'intestinos et fimo' — no real difference of meaning, but a difference in vocabulary. The variant is given here because the majority of marginal glosses on Leviticus are from Hesychius and Origen, whose commentaries used the Septuagint text. In order for their comments to make sense, the Gloss gives the reader the Septuagint variants. (Comments by each can be seen in Fig. 2, prefaced by Esic' and OR.)

On the same page, then, we can have two versions of the biblical text being used simultaneously, a strategy which signals a sophisticated understanding of what the 'Word of God' might be. Scholars knew there was no single 'Bible', but rather a number of different texts, each for a different audience.¹³ To speak of 'the Bible' was not to speak of a certainty: the text depended on its readers.

¹² Smith, *The 'Glossa ordinaria'*.

¹³ As well as those we have discussed, these included the so-called 'Paris' Bible produced by the University stationers; pictorial Bibles, such as the *Bible moralisée*; and vernacular versions such as the Wycliffite Bibles and the *Bible historiale*. See Light, 'French Bibles c. 1200–30'; Lowden, *The Making of the 'Bibles moralisées'*; Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*; Dove, *The First English Bible*; Sneddon, 'The Bible du XIII^e siècle'. Some of the variety of what 'Bible' might mean is reflected in the essays in Boynton and Reilly, eds, *The Practice of the Bible*.

Uncertainty about 'What Happened' in the Bible and How to Find Out

My next snapshot is of uncertainty about 'what happened' in the Bible; that is, what the literal meaning of the text was. One narrative of the history of medieval biblical exegesis sees it as a shift from readings following the spiritual senses to those focused on a literal reading of the text. The story is not quite so straightforward, not least because spiritual readings never disappear, even in the most literal interpreters; and also because the definition of literal expands to include meanings once firmly gathered under the spiritual senses.¹⁴ Nevertheless, from the mid-twelfth century onwards, there is an increasing interest in working out 'what happened' in biblical stories — and this interest is obviously associated with those commentators who were particularly concerned with expounding the literal sense of the text. One sustained example of this is the attempt by Richard of St Victor (d. 1173) to work out the geography and architecture of Ezekiel's vision of the Temple in Jerusalem.¹⁵ Solomon's Temple (I Kings 5–8), which incorporated the portable Ark and Tabernacle furnishings described in detail in the book of Exodus, was destroyed by the Babylonians in c. 586 BCE, but the prophet Ezekiel imagined a renewed and re-built Temple complex, depicting it in similarly minute terms in Ezekiel chapters 40–48. Partly because of this extended vision, Ezekiel was an unpopular book for commentators to expound.

Working under Master Hugh at the abbey of St Victor in Paris, Richard was trained to believe that spiritual understanding of the Bible began with a full understanding of the *letter* of the text.¹⁶ It was impossible to know what the Old Testament meant for Christians unless one also understood how it fitted together literally — in effect, one had to know 'what happened'. Richard is particularly keen to show that Ezekiel's re-envisioned Temple made practical sense; and to prove this, he equipped his commentary on the text with a series of diagrams, standard across copies of the work, to show that the imagined architecture could indeed be built.¹⁷ He seems to have been especially

¹⁴ For one important example of an author using an expanded literal sense, see Krey and Smith, eds, *Nicholas of Lyra*. For definition of the four senses of scripture and exegetical theories which employed them, see Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*; de Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale*; Robertson, *Lectio Divina*.

¹⁵ Richard of St Victor, *In visionem Ezechielis*.

¹⁶ See Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalion*, Bk 6, chs 1–5.

¹⁷ Cahn, 'Architectural Draughtmanship in Twelfth-century Paris'; Cahn, 'Architecture and Exegesis'; Rosenau, *Vision of the Temple*; Delano-Smith, 'Maps and Plans in Medieval Exegesis'; Delano-Smith, 'The Exegetical Jerusalem'.

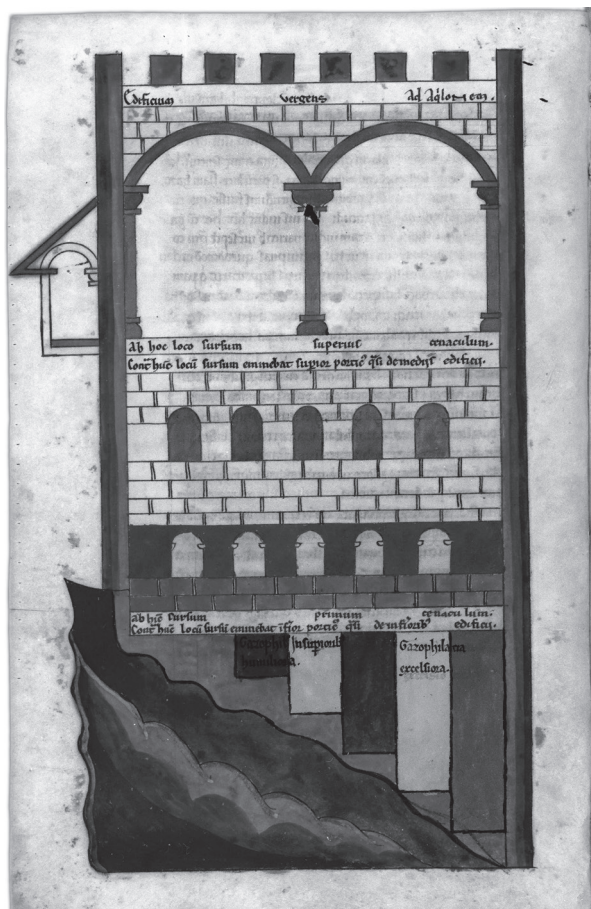


Figure 3. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 494, fol. 162^v: Richard of St Victor on Ezekiel 42: side elevation of northern gatehouse. England, third quarter of 12th c. Image by permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

concerned to show how the buildings could be positioned on their hillside site, and he gives diagrams not only of the front elevation of various elements, but also of the sides, showing the Temple Mount and the building foundations (Fig. 3. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 494, fol. 162^v: side elevation of northern gatehouse: Ezek. 42.)

These drawings are not meant as decoration; they form an integral part of Richard's exegesis and his attempt to understand the engineering involved in the construction. In order to show that Ezekiel is more than a dreamer, Richard needs to be certain that the dimensions and descriptions will work, and he uses the diagrams to lessen his (and his readers') uncertainty. If the literal sense could not be shown to be accurate, the truth of the whole biblical account would be called into question.

Another commentator with a need to understand the literal sense is the early fourteenth-century Franciscan Nicholas of Lyra (d. 1349), a scholar whose biblical commentary, the *Postilla*, was the most widely read of its time.¹⁸ Nicholas is a fascinating, sophisticated exponent of what we might today call historical criticism of the biblical text — that is to say, he treats it as an historical (rather than simply religious) document where all the things that ‘actually happened’ need to be explained. However, where Nicholas can suggest more than one possible explanation, he will often not decide between them. He leaves his readers to come to conclusions for themselves; he does not think that one answer needs to be chosen at the expense of others. As an example, let us look at Nicholas’s exegesis of the miracle of the feeding of the multitude in the Gospel of John (John 6. 5–14; cf. Matthew 14. 13–21, Mark 6. 31–44, Luke 9. 10–17). The story is well-known: Jesus with his disciples is preaching to a large crowd; the day draws on and everyone is hungry; the disciples scout around for food, and all they can find are five loaves of bread and two fish; miraculously, Jesus feeds the whole crowd with only these gleanings, and yet there are still twelve baskets of food left over.

The central event of the story — the miraculous multiplication of food — does not pose a problem. Nicholas simply accepts it as having happened. Next, Nicholas knows that the different Gospel accounts give different figures for the size of the crowd, but he can explain the discrepancy. Gospel writers are human authors, each with his own particular interests and focus: one may include only adult men in his count (according to local custom, perhaps, Nicholas says), whilst another includes all the women and children, too — the varying counts are understandable. Instead, Nicholas is far more interested in where the disciples got the twelve baskets from to put the leftovers in. He has three ideas: the first is that they called at a local villa and borrowed the baskets from there; the second is that they had brought the baskets with them, so that they could *buy* food for the crowd they anticipated would turn up to hear Jesus preach; and the third is that there *were* no actual baskets, but that John gives the number that would have been filled, had they had them, to illustrate just how abundant the miracle was.

As he commonly does, Nicholas leaves all three possibilities open and does not suggest that there must only be one answer. Rather, it is the fact that

¹⁸ Nicholas of Lyra, *Postilla litteralis et moralis*: unfortunately, there is no modern edition of this vast work, but there is a useful four-volume facsimile of the literal *postilla* (Frankfurt a.M.: Minerva, 1971) of the Strasbourg, 1492 printing. Krey and Smith, eds, *Nicholas of Lyra*, contains studies of Nicholas’s biblical commentary and a bibliography.

reasonable explanations of the text do exist that is important to him. We can see this in another example, where, after the Resurrection, the disciple Peter recognizes Jesus on the shore of Lake Tiberias (John 21. 7). Peter leaps from the boat in the middle of the lake, to get to Jesus, who is standing on the shore. As in the story of the feeding of the crowd, Nicholas takes the central miraculous event (here, the Resurrection) for granted; it is the corroborative detail that concerns him. He is worried that Peter could not have jumped overboard, since the other disciples behave differently, making for shore in the boat. He weighs up the chances of Peter being able to swim or, given the depth of the lake at this point, being able to stand up in the water and wade ashore. Nicholas knows (from his earlier exegesis of John 6. 19) that Peter was a big, strong man — and so he decides that both courses of action were possible, and that Peter would have done whichever got him to Jesus faster.

Nicholas does not need certainty in the answers to his questions about the text; and he does not think he has to give his readers a single explanation. But he does need to be certain that *some* reasonable explanation exists, so that the Gospel can be seen to be literally true. Like Richard, he is interested in the detail because unless *it* is true, then the whole text is called into question. The big picture is built up of small points; if they can be disproved, then the reader may rightly question the greater claims of Christian doctrine.

At least one other scholar turned to the literal sense out of uncertainty, or unease with the conventional interpretative methods on offer. William of Auvergne (d. 1249) was a master in the schools who became bishop of Paris in 1228.¹⁹ His works are written in a style that brings the voice of the classroom to life, especially in the questions and doubts his students express. William was aware of the power that arguments by Jews and Muslims had over untrained hearers and he set out to provide a Christian response. His writings refer to Maimonides and Avicenna by name, and he knew at least some of their work (though not in the original languages). William tries to present the Christian case so that it would convince the unbeliever or doubter as well as the believer. Putting himself in the place of the sceptic, he is aware of how ridiculous allegorical and tropological spiritual interpretations of the Bible look when they seem to have no connection with the literal story. He cites Christian exegesis of the story of David's adultery with Bathsheba (I Samuel 11–12), where David is said to be a type of Christ, and Uriah, Bathsheba's unfortunate husband, a type

¹⁹ William of Auvergne, *Opera omnia*; Morenzoni and Tilliette, eds, *Autour de Guillaume d'Auvergne* (with bibliography).

of the Devil.²⁰ William came to believe that such a reading ignored too much of what was on the page, and made Christian scholarship a laughing stock. In response, he simply stopped using the spiritual senses of interpretation altogether: they are not *expositions* of scripture, he says, they are abusive *impositions* on the text.²¹

Faced with explaining the myriad laws about food and behaviour in Leviticus, William has a slightly different problem.²² He does not want to dismiss them as stupid — only given to childish Jews who would not know better — because that would show God in a poor light. Instead, he tries to give each of them anthropological or practical explanations, taking in the desert conditions, the type of farming and livestock, the health implications of the various laws, and so on. For William, Scripture cannot be, or seem to be, meaningless, and so he employs reason rather than allegory to show that the meaning is sensible. He seems to have decided that his exposition would go just as far as reason would take him in the biblical text; he will not seek for certainty based on irrational explanations.

Uncertainty about Authority

All medieval teaching was founded on the interpretation of authoritative texts; and that interpretation had itself to be based on other authoritative texts. These provided examples to support or contradict the proposed readings. In two of his works, the *Didascalicon* and *De scripturis et scripturibus sacris*, Hugh of St Victor (d. 1141) discusses what was to count as ‘sacred scripture’: in effect, he is setting out rules for which texts could be used to interpret the Bible.²³ Hugh was the greatest master of the early twelfth-century Paris schools, and his writing is an attempt to give a theoretical backbone to the method that the schoolmen were defining in practice. His list of authorities is hierarchical and ordered. It begins with the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, each divided

²⁰ Smalley, ‘William of Auvergne, John of La Rochelle and Saint Thomas’, pp. 151–56.

²¹ ‘Quia vero nonnullos offendunt, et graviter scandalisant sacrae scripturae hujus expositiones, unde et abusive impositiones eis potius videtur, quam expositiones quaedam earum; laborabimus paucis, ut eis super hoc satisfaciamus’, *De legibus*, c. 17, in William of Auvergne, *Opera omnia*, I, 48; Smith, ‘William of Auvergne and the Law’, pp. 135–37.

²² *De legibus*, in William of Auvergne, *Opera omnia*, I, 18–102; Smalley, ‘William of Auvergne, John of La Rochelle and Saint Thomas’; Smith, ‘William of Auvergne and the Law’.

²³ Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalicon*; Hugh of St Victor, *De Scripturis et scripturibus sanctis*; Zinn, ‘Hugh of St Victor’s “De scripturis et scripturibus sacris”’.

into three parts; then come the Church Fathers and the Decrees of the Church Councils; lastly, and surprisingly, he includes the works of some modern (quasi-contemporary, though always dead) scholars — showing that for Hugh, God's word continued to be revealed.

The schoolmen's working method never laid down a single list of specific authors, although in practice the Latin Fathers always include Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, and Gregory the Great, and they could stretch at least to Bede, Alcuin, and Isidore of Seville. The Greek authorities most commonly included Origen, Hesychius, John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Pseudo-Dionysius. These older authorities were joined by a shifting group of *moderni*, credited (on the basis of general scholarly opinion) with particular status. By the thirteenth century, these included Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109), Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), and Hugh of St Victor himself. Living scholars could be cited, but always anonymously, using *alii* or *quidam* to introduce their arguments. Authors were employed in order of seniority (with biblical books cited in order of Christological importance), with an implicit sense of the degree of authority enjoyed by each — a calculation which appears to depend on the antiquity of the source (or rather, its closeness to the time of Christ) and its consistent acceptance by the Church. Thus, arguments drawn from the Bible are given first, followed by Augustine and the other Church Fathers, and so on, down to the moderns.

While Hugh was defining permissible authorities, his contemporary Peter Abelard was writing in support of argument *per se*. Abelard's *Sic et non* musters diverse authoritative opinions on either side of disputed questions, so that their dissonance will lead to further inquiry and a closer understanding of the truth. It is a method fundamentally based on doubt. In Abelard's well-known phrase: 'it is by doubting that we come to searching; and by searching we perceive the truth.'²⁴ For Abelard, uncertainty has its uses, as the inspiration for research. The *Sic et non* poses questions and lays out arguments for (*sic*) and against (*non*); but it intentionally offers no conclusions, nor does Abelard give any guide to judging between the diverse authorities he presents.

Anselm of Laon claimed that the opinions of the Fathers were 'diverse, but not adverse', and that 'those with experience soon show that harmony comes from dissonance'; but it is not at all clear just how this was to be done.²⁵ The early

²⁴ 'Dubitando quippe ad inquisitionem venimus; inquirendo veritatem percipimus': Peter Abelard, *Sic et Non*, ed. by Boyer and McKeon, prologue, l. 330 (p. 103).

²⁵ Anselm of Laon, 'Letter to Heribrand' (ll. 10–16), p. 176; translated in Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life*, p. 87.

Franciscan master Alexander of Hales (d. 1245), for instance, sought to reassure his students as he pointed out the disagreements between Augustine and Origen on the numbering of the Ten Commandments: the two differed on how the precepts were divided between the two stone tablets, and whether there was one (Origen) or two (Augustine) commandments forbidding covetousness. There is no question of heresy in their diverse views, Alexander says, because what they are debating is ‘beyond the substance of the faith’ (*‘praeter substantiam fidei’*) — that is to say, it is not a creedal issue, and so disagreement is acceptable.²⁶ Alexander sides with Augustine on this question, but only because he thinks Augustine’s solution is more neatly Trinitarian; Origen’s, in fact, is a closer reading of the biblical text. Alexander’s slightly older contemporary, William of Auxerre, considers the same question.²⁷ He says that both Augustine and Origen interpret the text well (*‘bene’*), since both interpretations are approved by the Church (*‘approbat ecclesia’*), but that Augustine’s exposition must be better (*‘melius’*) because he gets closer to the substance of the issue (*‘magis rei substantiam declaravit’*). But William’s argument is circular here: Augustine is closer to the substance of the issue because William has identified the substance of the issue with Augustine’s Trinitarian formulation. The solution, then, is decided upon using an external interpretative key — in this case, the Trinity — rather than by the dialectical method *per se*. The juxtaposition of competing authorities has not in itself produced an answer; it has simply set up the question to be asked, by demonstrating the existence of uncertainty.

We can see the same deployment of a external principle applied to the question of whether adulterers should be allowed to marry, when the original spouse or spouses die. The opposing positions were set up by citing the authority of Leo the Great, who thought they should not, and Augustine, who thought they should. In a short discussion (*sententia*) from the school of Anselm of Laon (d. 1117), the solution comes down on the side of Leo, on the grounds that adulterers should not be encouraged, particularly when they might plot against their spouses.²⁸ But when Peter Lombard (d. 1160) considers the same question, citing the same two authorities, he prefers Augustine, because Augustine’s position encourages repentance and lawful marriage.²⁹ Penitence

²⁶ Alexander of Hales, *Glossa in IV libros sententiarum*, lib. III, d. 37, c. 4, d.

²⁷ William of Auxerre, *Summa aurea*, ed. by Ribaillier, lib. III, tr. xlv, c. 1.

²⁸ Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, v, nos 66 and 67, pp. 57–58; and see below, ‘Uncertainty about Answers’.

²⁹ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris*, ed. by Brady, lib. IV, d. 35, c. 4.1.

and matrimony were both sacraments, according to the Lombard's important and influential ordering of sacramental theory, and it is this factor which appears to sway his judgement of the issue. The opposing authorities have set up the question, but the authoritative method does not provide the answer, without additional external considerations.

Uncertainty about Jewish Authority

Remarkably, some scholars drew upon non-Christian sources in their list of authorities, although there might be questions about their standing. The case of Aristotle is well-known, so here I shall explore the less familiar influence of Jewish sources.³⁰ Although the Old Testament, or Hebrew Bible, posed an obstinate puzzle for Christian interpreters, nevertheless using Jewish exegesis — the most obvious place to turn for help — presented a number of difficulties. These included the practical problems of understanding the language, of getting access to the materials, and of negotiating with living Jewish scholars, as well as the peculiar ideological issue of what status the new chosen people should give to the interpretations of the former elect.

Despite these complications, for some scholars, listening to the Jews was an important part of their interpretative armoury. This was especially true for commentators interested in the literal meaning of the text — and so once again we turn to Nicholas of Lyra as an example. Nicholas sought out texts from the Jewish tradition to bolster his own exegesis and, exceptionally, he appears to have learned Hebrew (at least to some extent) in order to do this better. In particular, he was familiar with the work of the great eleventh-century commentator from Troyes in Northern France, Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, known as Rashi.³¹

Rashi is mentioned by name in the Prologue to Nicholas's massive biblical commentary, the *Postilla*: 'I intend', he says, 'not only to use the words of the Catholic doctors, but also those of the Hebrews, especially Rabbi Solomon among the Hebrew doctors, who is better [*rationabilius*] at interpreting the literal sense'.³² In many places where he thinks Christian tradition sheds little light,

³⁰ Van Steenberghen, *Aristotle in the West*.

³¹ Hailperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars*; Dahan and others, eds, *Rashi et la culture juive en France du Nord*; Signer, 'Vision and History: Nicholas of Lyra'; Goodwin, 'Take Hold of the Robe of a Jew'.

³² In common with other Christian scholars, Nicholas uses the less pejorative 'Hebrews' (*Hebraei*) to denote Jewish scholars and scholarship, rather than 'Jews' (*Iudaei*).

Nicholas turns to Rashi, not only for examples, but also for the structure of his exegesis. While he never strays from doctrinal orthodoxy, Nicholas maintains an enormous admiration for Jewish readings of the Hebrew text: phrases such as ‘the Hebrews say, and it seems correctly [...]’, or ‘the Hebrews seem to understand this better when they say [...]’, are commonly found in Nicholas’s work.

Nicholas wants to understand the literal sense because, for him, God (rather than the devil) is in the detail. If he can show that the Bible is correct in all its details, he is well on the way to proving that God exists — or, more realistically, he can prove that everything God has said to humans by way of the Bible is true. But how can he expound the details, when much of the biblical text seems sketchy or obscure, with need for a human interpreter to flesh out its meaning? Nicholas turns to the Jews. Their understanding of the original language of the Hebrew scriptures, and their continued familiarity with much of ancient custom and tradition, gave them insights that Christians simply lacked. And yet, his strategy placed Nicholas in a quandary: as an orthodox Christian believer and Franciscan friar, he could not admit that, in any important sense, the Jews were right; but as a conscientious scholar, he knew that they had much to teach him.

We can see Nicholas’s dilemma vividly illustrated on the pages of the *Postilla*. Nicholas included, alongside his written text, a series of diagrams and illustrations.³³ We can be sure that they were meant as part of the original work because Nicholas refers to them, often noting that the pictures can promote better understanding of the written text: ‘And so that what I have said can be better understood, I have drawn a figure which can be looked at, together with the written description, to make the text clear.’³⁴ They are not included as an afterthought, squeezed into the margins like an annotation, but are designed along with the whole presentation. As in Richard of St Victor, the pictures are not meant as decoration or creative illustration; they deliberately do not invent

³³ Only a minority of the manuscripts have these pictures, and even those which have them do not always have all the possible illustrations. However, manuscripts without the drawings commonly have space left for them to be copied in later, showing that the illustrations, along with the introductory captions, were considered to be part of the work, rather than an optional extra. Although the first edition of the *Postilla* (Rome, 1471–72) does not have the illustrations, they were inserted in the 1481 Anton Koberger edition and are common subsequently. Kaczynski, ‘Illustrations of the Tabernacle and Temple Implements’; Rosenau, ‘The Architecture of Nicolaus de Lyra’s Temple Illustrations’; Cahn, ‘Notes on the Illustrations of Ezekiel’s Temple Vision’; Smith, ‘Jews and Christians Imagining the Temple’; Smith, ‘The Imaginary Jerusalem of Nicholas of Lyra’.

³⁴ ‘Et ut melius dicta capiantur descripsi predicta in figura que inspecta et consideratis predictis patet littera paucis exceptis; Exodus 28 (figure of the high priest).

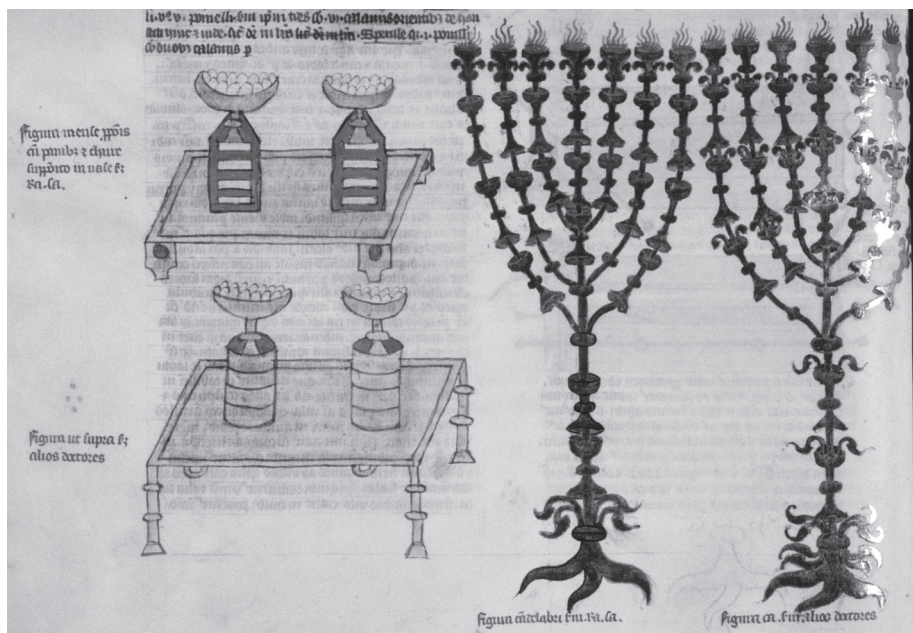


Figure 4: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 251, fol. 49v: Nicholas of Lyra, *Postilla* on Exodus 25: menorah and table with showbread. France, late 14th c.
Image by permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

material beyond the limits of what the biblical text might be understood to describe. The pictures are a constituent part of Nicholas's exegesis, taking their place within the body of material he presents, both physically and intellectually. All the more interesting, then, that in about a quarter of the instances which he chooses to illustrate, Nicholas presents not just one figure but two: one with the Christian interpretation, and one with the Jewish.

Figure 4 (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 251, fol. 49v) shows one example from Exodus 25, which depicts two versions of the menorah and the table with showbread, part of the furniture in the Tabernacle. The captions (which invariably accompany the diagrams) explain which version follows the Christian and which the Jewish (generally Rashi's) interpretation. Here, as he often does, Nicholas describes Rashi as a 'doctor'.³⁵ The differences between

³⁵ The figures here are captioned: 'Figure [...] according to Rabbi Solomon', 'Figure according to other learned men'. Others read, e.g., 'according to the Latins [...] according to the Hebrews', 'according to the Catholic doctors (or 'learned men') [...] according to the Hebrew doctors', 'according to the opinion of Rabbi Solomon'.

the two traditions are, of necessity, questions of detail; nonetheless, Nicholas thinks them worth illustrating visually as well as textually.

Nicholas is caught in uncertainty: as a preaching friar, he believes in the essential Christian understanding of the text, but as a scholar, he often seems to prefer the Jewish readings. So he gives both. As with the loaves and fishes, the reader is left to decide for himself.

Uncertainty about Answers

We have seen Nicholas of Lyra being prepared to leave biblical questions open, as long as credible answers existed. Was the same true of scholars who tried to answer theological questions? Alongside biblical commentary, twelfth-century teaching included sessions which considered specific issues of theological importance — questions arising from the biblical text, but not directly addressed in Scripture. These ranged from metaphysical concepts such as the nature of God or the state of Adam in paradise, to questions of practical morality about baptism, say, or marriage. We know about these discussion seminars from collections of *sententiae* (loosely translated as ‘opinions’, or simply ‘sentences’) that we think are short notes made by teachers preparing for the sessions, or their students recording them.³⁶ The apotheosis of these *sententiae* collections comes with Peter Lombard’s *Four Books of Sentences*, which dates from the later 1150s.³⁷ But the extant earlier collections of this material are associated with Master Anselm and his school at Laon. Because of the unfinished form in which they have been preserved to us, they are generally less ordered than Peter Lombard’s book, and the individual ‘sentences’ range in length from a few lines to a page or more of printed text. Each is a response to a question, implied or explicit. Most are a series of statements about the question; others quote biblical texts or patristic authors.

Do they come to definite conclusions? Well, yes and no. Sometimes the text is consciously equivocal: ‘Whether the Last Judgement is given in a material voice’, one discussion states, ‘is neither affirmed nor denied’ — adding straight afterwards: ‘But this is certain: the Son of Man will appear in the same form in

³⁶ Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, v; Flint, ‘The “School of Laon”’; Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe*, II, ch. 3; Giraud, ‘*Per verba magistri*’; Clanchy and Smith, ‘Abelard’s Description of the School of Laon’.

³⁷ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris*, ed. by Brady.

which he was judged'.³⁸ In other cases, as we have seen, the discussion adduces two different opinions from authoritative sources — such as Leo the Great and Augustine — about the same question.³⁹ Sometimes, though, the discussion rehearses arguments and cannot find an answer: 'By what justice', it asks, 'are the souls of children who die before baptism damned?'. This is one of the longest *sententiae*, but after seventy lines of text, it can only conclude: 'Occulta sunt iudicia dei'.⁴⁰

But more commonly than any of these examples, the *sententiae* do not seek to give — or at least, they do not in the end give — a simple answer to the original question. Instead, they are more likely to open the question up by posing further questions arising from a closer consideration of the problem. So a seemingly straightforward question, 'Are catechumens who die before they are baptised saved or not?', gets far more than a yes or no answer.⁴¹ The solution depends on why they delayed being baptized. Were they prevented from doing so? Were they simply negligent — they never got around to it? And what role did parents play in helping or hindering the child to know the faith? All these factors have to be taken into account before one might reach a conclusion.

It is not surprising, then, that Peter Abelard, in his mocking description of Anselm's teaching with such *sententiae*, says, 'Anyone who knocked at his door to seek an answer to some question went away more uncertain than he came'.⁴² Anselm was a celebrated (and comparatively elderly) master by the time Abelard went to hear him at his school in Laon, and Abelard's purpose here is to denigrate his reputation, to deny that he had anything useful to say. Famously contrary and difficult himself, we cannot take Abelard's assessment of Anselm at face value, not least because it is not clear that this fomenting of uncertainty was not precisely what Anselm was aiming to do. Rather than give or encourage pat answers, he sought to broaden the terms of the debate and show that the theological world was a more complex place than the initial questions make it out to be; like academics everywhere, he preferred questions to answers. Moreover, although Abelard tries to discredit Anselm, his own version of theological *sententiae*, the *Sic et non*, looks very similar: questions, followed

³⁸ Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, v, no. 92, p. 79.

³⁹ Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, v, nos 66 and 67, pp. 57–58.

⁴⁰ Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, v, no. 46, pp. 42–44.

⁴¹ Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, v, no. 59, p. 54.

⁴² Peter Abelard, *Historia calamitatum: texte critique*, ed. by Monfrin, ll. 165–67; *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise*, ed. by Radice, p. 7.

by arguments on both sides, often not resolved but, rather, re-framing the question to give a different view.⁴³ In his turn, Bernard of Clairvaux described Abelard as ‘altogether ambiguous’.⁴⁴

Context and Certainty

William of Auvergne wants the Bible not to appear to be irrational; nevertheless, like Richard of St Victor and Nicholas of Lyra, he is prepared to live with explanations that are merely possible, rather than definitely true. All three scholars work in a world of various and variable biblical texts. One reason they can deal with such uncertainty is the oral context of much of their teaching. Masters could be more speculative and imprecise in oral presentation than they might be in writing: a student writes in the margin of a copy of Peter Lombard’s *Sentences* that what Peter said in discussion was not quite the same as this written text.⁴⁵ Another notes, ‘we accept certain things in a lecture that we would not accept when writing it down’.⁴⁶ The idea of a response appropriate to a particular context or genre of discourse was well understood: Innocent III wrote to Peter of Compostela: ‘We answer these points in the manner of a scholar. But if we should have to answer them in the manner of the papacy, we should indeed answer more simply but more cautiously’.⁴⁷ Innocent knew what Peter Abelard had to learn the hard way: what was acceptable in the speculative arena of the classroom, should not always be written down in black and white.⁴⁸

For those studying the Bible there were at least two levels of knowledge. The first dealt with the material set down in the articles of faith — creedal questions such as the relation of the persons of the Trinity or the truth of the Resurrection

⁴³ Peter Abelard, *Sic et Non*, ed. by Boyer and McKeon: see n. 24; and see Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life*, and Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, for discussion and bibliography.

⁴⁴ Bernard of Clairvaux, letter 193 (Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sancti Bernardi opera*, ed. by Leclercq, Talbot, and Rochais, VIII, p. 44, l. 18), trans. in Clanchy, *Abelard: A Medieval Life*, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Text from Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS Pat. 128, fol. 17va: quoted in Brady, ‘Peter Manducator and the Oral Teachings of Peter Lombard’, at p. 479.

⁴⁶ ‘quaedam concedimus in legendo, que non concedimus in disserendo’, Troyes, Médiathèque du Grand Troyes (formerly Bibliothèque municipale de Troyes), MS lat. 964, fol. 113^v: quoted in Landgraf, ‘Schwankungen in der Lehre des Petrus Lombardus’, p. 534.

⁴⁷ ‘scholastico more [...] more apostolico [...] simplicius quidem sed cautius respondemus’ (PL 216, col. 1178B).

⁴⁸ Clanchy and Smith, ‘Abelard’s Description of the School of Laon’; Thijssen, *Censure and Heresy at the University of Paris*.

— and this knowledge was certain. But it was also quite limited in scope. Far greater were the biblical and theological questions that could reasonably be the subject of discussion and speculation. Precisely because the creedal certainties set the boundaries of debate, uncertainty elsewhere was not a threat. As long as this was done by scholars among scholars, uncertainty was permissible, indeed desirable, since it should lead to greater understanding. Certainty and uncertainty, then, could live side by side.

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ON RECOGNIZING THE LIMITS OF OUR UNDERSTANDING: MEDIEVAL DEBATES ABOUT MERLIN AND MARVELS

Karen Sullivan

Throughout the first narrative accounts of him, in the twelfth and the early thirteenth centuries, Merlin, more than any other character in the matter of Britain, is characterized as someone who speaks and performs ‘marvels’ (*mirabilia* in Latin or *merveilles* in French).¹ At this time, ‘marvels’ were considered to be phenomena so new, rare, or extraordinary that they caused those who beheld them ‘to marvel’ (*mirari* or *admirari* in Latin or *merveiller* in French). Whether they were a salamander, which survives in the fire; an eclipse, which darkens the sun at midday; a magnet, which attracts to itself iron filaments; a mechanical bird, which sings when the breeze blows through it; or the Dead Sea, which causes heavy objects to float on its waters, marvels were seen as contradicting the laws of nature in ways that were both mysterious and meaningful. As Gervase of Tilbury puts it, ‘We generally call those things miracles

¹ My thoughts about the marvelous are most influenced by Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*. See also Barlett, *The Natural and the Supernatural*; Bynum, ‘Wonder’; Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*; Le Goff, ‘The Marvelous in the Medieval West’; Le Goff, ‘Le Merveilleux scientifique au Moyen Âge’; Meslin and Bériou, eds, *Le Merveilleux*; and Lecouteux, ‘Introduction à l’étude du merveilleux médiéval’. On the marvelous in medieval French literature, in particular, see Poirion, *Le Merveilleux dans la littérature française*, and Faral, ‘Le Merveilleux et ses sources’.

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[*miracula*] which, being beyond nature, we ascribe to divine power [...] while we call those things marvels [*mirabilia*] which are beyond our comprehension, even though they are natural; in fact, the inability to explain why a thing is so constitutes a marvel.² How is it possible, though, that a part of the natural world cannot be understood according to the laws of nature? How can there be anything in the natural world that is inherently inexplicable? In the context of Christianity, which typically assigns supernatural abilities only to God, if a marvel is not a miracle and, hence, not a product of divine power, does it not necessarily follow that it must be a product of diabolical illusion?

In all of the texts written about him in the Middle Ages, Merlin causes those around him to marvel because, in contravention of the laws of nature, he knows the secrets of the past, the present, and the future, and because he can transform his appearance and that of those around him at will.³ Yet how can a mere human being perform such feats? Given that Merlin is never described as a saint, from whom such miracles might be expected, does it not necessarily follow that he must be a limb of the devil? In both scholarly, Latinate treatises and literary, vernacular romances, medieval thinkers debated the status of marvels and the status of Merlin, at once agreeing that there were people like this seer who seemed to possess preternatural gifts and disagreeing as to how one should make sense of them.

Around 1200, in his Old French prose romance *Merlin*, Robert de Boron composed an account of Merlin's life which accentuated the marvelousness of his words and deeds on virtually every page. At one point, Robert represents Blaise, a learned cleric and Merlin's mother's spiritual counsellor, as frightened by the young Merlin's marvellous abilities. He begs Merlin to swear 'that [he] neither trick nor deceive [him], nor do anything which is not to the pleasure of Our Lord'.⁴ He responds to Merlin's marvellous abilities with a desire to understand how he is able to act contrary to the laws of nature and, through this understanding, to assure himself that he is not affiliated with the devil. Yet Merlin advises Blaise not to test him, explaining, 'The more you test me,

² 'Porro miracula dicimus usitatus que preter naturam divine virtuti ascribimus [...]. Mirabilia vero dicimus que nostre cognicioni non subiacent, etiam cum sunt naturalia; sed et mirabilia constituit ignorantia reddende rationis quare sic sit', Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia*, ed. and trans. by Banks and Binns, III, Preface (p. 558). Translation modified.

³ Recent general studies of Merlin include Knight, *Merlin*; Goodrich and Thompson, eds, *Merlin*; Hardling, *Merlin and Legendary Romance*; Markale, *Merlin l'enchanteur, ou l'éternelle quête magique*; Jarman, *The Legend of Merlin*; and Zumthor, *Merlin le prophète*.

⁴ 'Tu ne me puisses engingnien ne decevoir ne faire chose qui au plaisir Nostre Seingor ne soit', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 16 (p. 73).

the more you will marvel'.⁵ Instead of subjecting him to such examinations, he recommends, 'Do what I beseech you to, and believe a great part of what I tell you'.⁶ With these words, which the author seems to second, Robert suggests that one should respond to Merlin's marvellous abilities, not as Blaise has been doing, with a desire to understand how he is able to defy the laws of nature, but, rather, with a willingness simply to believe that he does so. One should not test him but, rather, believe in him, because any effort to make the inexplicable explicable will only make it more perplexing. Historians of magic like Edward Peters and Richard Kieckhefer have argued that the treatment of Merlin in medieval romances bears little relation to the treatment of magicians in the theological and pastoral writings at this time, where they were unequivocally condemned.⁷ It may be, however, that, in recommending that one not try to understand Merlin's marvels but, rather, believe in him, Robert's *Merlin* and the countless romances that followed it purposefully oppose these didactic works. It may be that they suggest that all wonder-workers who are not of God are not necessarily of the devil; that all preternatural phenomena which are not miraculous are not necessarily diabolical; and that all matters which cannot be explained are not for that reason to be disbelieved. In Robert's *Merlin*, as in romance in general, the marvellous constitutes a third category, fundamentally inassimilable into the binary structures of medieval theologico-scientific ways of thinking and, as a result, fundamentally incapable of being understood, but no less valid on that account.

In the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, thinkers invested in certain rationalist traditions, such as philosophy or theology, tended to reject the notion of a marvel because they rejected the possibility that anything natural was outside human comprehension. Aristotle cites 'wonder' (θαυμάζω)⁸ as the

⁵ 'Tant com tu plus m'essaieras, et tu plus te merveilleras', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 16 (p. 71).

⁶ 'Mais fai ce que je te prierai et croi grant partie de ce que je te dirai', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 16 (p. 71). The text gives no explanation as to why Blaise should believe only 'grant partie' of that which Merlin tells him.

⁷ See Peters, *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law*, pp. xii and 52–53 and Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 109 and 113. Kieckhefer observes that romancers suggest, if one uses the occult arts for good ends, as Merlin does, one does not necessarily enter into the devil's power, and that, in doing so, they differ from the theologians of their time, but he does not elaborate upon this point.

⁸ Here and elsewhere I cite Aristotle in the Latin translation of William of Moerbeke: 'It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize' ('propter admira-

origin of philosophy, in so far as man's recognition of his inability to explain something (such as the changes of the sun and the moon or the origin of the universe) makes him want to explain it, but he also makes clear that, by the very process of coming up with an explanation, man seeks to replace wonder with knowledge. He writes, 'He who is perplexed and marvels thinks himself to be ignorant [...]. It was to escape ignorance that men studied philosophy'.⁹ While Aristotle perceives wonder positively, as an incitement to learning, because it makes one want to know the cause of what one is beholding, other philosophers perceive it negatively, as a deterrent to rigorous thought, because it makes one think that no such cause is to be found. Cicero,¹⁰ Boethius,¹¹ Isidore of Seville,¹² John of Salisbury,¹³ and the scholastics who follow them insist that all creatures exist in harmony with the laws of nature and, by extension, with God, who has established the laws of nature. If we perceive something as contrary to those laws, they reason, it is only because we do not yet understand how it adheres to them. When a nephew asks Adelard of Bath about thunder, 'an object of wonder to all people',¹⁴ Adelard reproaches him for remaining at the level of wonderment instead of proceeding to knowledge. 'Look more closely!' he urges. 'Consider the circumstances! Lay down the causes first, and you will not be surprised by the effect. Do not be the kind of man who prefers not knowing to coming nearer'.¹⁵ If his nephew allows his mind to be 'veiled by the marvelousness and strangeness'¹⁶ of the matter, Adelard suggests, it is only because he considers the matter from afar, without asking why it occurs; if he considered it more closely

tionem enim et nunc et primo coeperunt homines philosophari'); see *Metaphysica*, in Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, trans by Moerbeke, ed. by Mauro, I. 3 (IV, p. 261).

⁹ 'Qui vero dubitat et admiratur, putat se ignorare [...] quare si propter fugam ignorantiae philosophati sunt', *Metaphysica*, in Aristotle, *Opera omnia*, trans by Moerbeke, ed. by Mauro, I. 3 (IV, p. 261).

¹⁰ See Cicero, *De divinatione; De fato; Timaeus*, ed. by Plasburg and Ax, II. 28. 60 (p. 89).

¹¹ See Boethius, *Philosophiae consolatio*, ed. by Bieler, IV. 5 (p. 78, ll. 17–22).

¹² See Isidore of Seville, *Eymologiae*, Bk XI, c. 3, sections 1–2 (PL 82, col. 419).

¹³ See John of Salisbury, *Policraticus I–IV*, ed. by Keats-Rohan, II. 12 (p. 91).

¹⁴ 'Omnibus populis mirandum', Adelard of Bath, *Questiones naturales*, ed. and trans. by Burnett, p. 202.

¹⁵ 'Propius intueri, circumstantias adde, causas prepone, et effectum non mirabere. Ne sis ille qui mavult nescire quam accedere', Adelard of Bath, *Questiones naturales*, ed. and trans. by Burnett, pp. 202–04.

¹⁶ 'Ammiratione enim insolentiaque indutus', Adelard of Bath, *Questiones naturales*, ed. and trans. by Burnett, p. 202.

and came to understand it better, he would not feel such amazement.¹⁷ In order fully to comprehend phenomena like those that produce thunder, rationalist thinkers believed, it is necessary to grasp both their 'manifest' properties, such as hotness or coldness, wetness or dryness, which are perceptible to our senses, and their 'occult' or hidden properties, which are not perceptible in the same way. In so far as demons are able to produce marvels, it is not because they are able to break the laws of nature, but, rather, because they are able to access these occult properties through their own ingenuity and to use them to produce the effects they seek. Like farmers, who know the occult properties of the seeds they plant, Peter Lombard writes, 'Evil angels [...] know, by virtue of the subtlety of their sense and body, the seeds of these things which are more concealed from us',¹⁸ and they manipulate those seeds in order to delude human beings. If one wishes not to be deceived by demons or by fools taken in by demons, such thinkers maintained, one must learn to trace the supposedly marvellous qualities of certain phenomena to their occult properties. So sceptical were such rationalist thinkers of marvels that the author of the thirteenth-century *De mirabilibus mundi* ascribed to Albertus Magnus writes, 'A great part of philosophers and physicians believe that all marvelousness of experience and marvels arises from natural things'.¹⁹ If you discover explanations for seemingly inexplicable natural phenomena, he affirms, 'You will see that nothing is marvellous',²⁰ and, if you publicize those explanations, you will fulfil your duty as a wise man, which, he states, is 'to make marvels cease'.²¹ The world must be disenchanted, that is, rid of the marvels which, as the result of diabolical delusion or human ignorance, make the unified, coherent, and centralized natural order seem scattered, contradictory, and multi-polar.

¹⁷ Avicenna makes a similar claim in *De viribus cordis*, II. 10, in Avicenna, *Canon medicinae*, trans. by Arnold of Villanova (no page numbers).

¹⁸ 'Mali angeli [...] pro subtilitate sui sensus et corporis, semina istarum rerum nobis occultiora noverunt', Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris*, ed. by Brady, pars II, liber II, dist. 7. 8 (I, p. 363).

¹⁹ 'Credidit magna pars philosophorum et medicorum quod tota mirabilitas experimentorum et mirabilium exirit a rebus naturalis', Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Liber de mirabilibus mundi*, p. 158.

²⁰ 'Tu vides quod nihil est mirabile', Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Liber de mirabilibus mundi*, p. 187.

²¹ 'Facere quod cesset omne mirabile', Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Liber de mirabilibus mundi*, p. 187.

Also during the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, thinkers invested in certain contemplative traditions, such as Augustinian rhetoric or monastic spirituality, accepted the notion of a marvel because they viewed the natural as a mirror of the divine, which is indeed outside our grasp. To those sceptics who would deny the existence of Christian miracles because they thwart attempts at rational explanation, Augustine points out the existence of natural marvels around us, which likewise frustrate such efforts. When these sceptics refuse to believe, for example, that human beings will burn in hell for eternity because nothing can burn forever without being consumed, he asks how they can account for asbestos, which, he alleges, once set afire, cannot be put out. 'How do they dispose of those things for which a reason cannot be given, and which nonetheless exist, though in apparent contradiction to the nature of things?'²² he asks. Of marvels and miracles, he asserts, 'We confess that the weak reasoning of mortals cannot master these and other such wonders of God's working.'²³ Ultimately, for Augustine, it is not just when we are faced with a miracle, like the Virgin Birth or Lazarus's resurrection, but when we are faced with a marvel, like asbestos or indeed, any part of creation, whose inherent marvelousness we overlook once we have grown used to it, that we should wonder at the unfathomable nature of God as reflected in his creatures. The *Navigatio sancti Brendani*, which was composed in Latin in the sixth century and translated into Anglo-Norman in the twelfth, illustrates this Augustinian tendency to marvel at the created world and, in doing so, to appreciate the creator who fashioned it. At one point during their journey in the North Atlantic, Brendan and his monks arrive at an island with a tree so covered with snow-white birds that none of its branches or leaves can be seen. The French text relates that 'The abbot began to marvel and prayed that God his counsellor show him the reason why such a great number of birds had come to this place'.²⁴ On another day, Brendan and his monks come across what seems to have been an iceberg, which the author of the Latin text describes as a column of clear crystal so high that

²² 'Quid ad ista respondent, de quibus ratio reddi ab homine non potest, et tamen sunt, et ipsi rationi naturae videntur esse contraria?', Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, ed. by Dombart and Kalb, XXI. 5 (p. 766).

²³ 'Nos non posse confiteremur, eo quod istis et similibus Dei miris operibus infirma mortalium ratiocinatio uinceretur', Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, ed. by Dombart and Kalb, XXI. 5 (p. 766).

²⁴ 'Li abes prent a merveiller | et priët Deu sun conseller | que li mustret quel cose seit, | si grant plentét des oiseaus que deit, | que leu ço seit u est venuz', Benedeit, *The Anglo-Norman Voyage of St Brendan*, ed. by Short and Merrilees, p. 43, ll. 501–05.

its summit cannot be glimpsed. When Brendan beholds the crystal column, he orders the monks to steer their boat through an opening in it, 'so that we may see carefully the wonderful works of our Creator'.²⁵ Elsewhere in the French text, Brendan informs his monks why it is important that they behold marvels, like the birds or the crystal column: 'God wanted to lead you here because he wanted to teach you. The more you see his marvels, the more you will believe in him'.²⁶ The writings of Bernard of Clairvaux constitute perhaps the most compelling medieval illustration of the virtue of marvelling at creation. In the course of his devout contemplation of the Virgin Mary, whose name had long been (mistakenly) identified with 'the star of the sea' (*stella maris*), Bernard indulges in what he calls 'devout contemplation of this twinkling star'.²⁷ He writes, 'The star sends forth its ray without harm to itself. In the same way, the Virgin brought forth her son with no injury to herself. The ray no more diminishes the star's brightness than the Son diminishes the Virgin's integrity [...]. I tell you, she is that splendid and outstanding star suspended as by necessity over this great, spacious sea, twinkling with merit and illuminating by example'.²⁸ Though Brendan focuses upon a flock of birds and an iceberg, as creatures fashioned by God, and Bernard focuses upon the Mother of God, as a being similar to a star, both monks try to deepen their appreciation of a transcendent, spiritual reality through their meditation upon an immediate, physical reality. Far from being disenchanted, the world must retain its marvels, which continually remind us of the irreducible mysteriousness of creation and of the God who made it.

For thinkers invested in rationalist traditions, Merlin's marvels and, especially, his ability to foretell the future are diabolical in origin and, hence, necessarily deceptive. William of Newburgh, an Augustinian canon writing

²⁵ 'Ut videamus diligenter magnalia creatoris nostri', *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*, ed. by Selmer, ch. 22 (p. 59).

²⁶ 'Pur ço vus volt Deus ci mener | que il vus voleit plus asener: | ses merveilles cum plus verrez, | en lui puis mult mieulx crerez', Benedeit, *The Anglo-Norman Voyage of St Brendan*, ed. by Short and Merrilees, p. 42, ll. 473–76.

²⁷ 'Devota scintillantis sideris contemplatione', Bernard of Clairvaux, *De laudibus Virginis Matris*, ed. by Leclercq and Rochais, III (pp. 13–58; at p. 35).

²⁸ 'Sicut sine sui corruptione sidus suum emittit radium, sic absque sui laesione virgo parit filium. Nec sideri radius suam minuit claritatem, nec Virgini Filius suam integritatem [...]. Ipsa, inquam, est praeclara et eximia stella, super hoc mare magnum et spatiosum necessario sublevata, micans meritis, illustrans exemplis', Bernard of Clairvaux, *De laudibus Virginis Matris*, ed. by Leclercq and Rochais, p. 35.

sometime before 1198, speaks with scorn of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, the Latin text which had provided the foundation for Robert's life of Merlin. Though Geoffrey ascribed more prophecies to Merlin than Christians do to Isaiah, and though he acknowledged that Merlin was the son of an incubus demon, William complains, 'He did not dare to introduce [Merlin's] vaticinations by saying, "Thus spoke the Lord", and he was ashamed to introduce them by saying, "Thus spoke the devil"'.²⁹ Whatever veracity Merlin's admirers might attribute to these predictions, he warns, these predictions can only be false, as demons have no genuine capacity for prophesying. Though demons can apprehend the future by 'conjecturing',³⁰ on account of their possession of subtle understanding, he observes, they cannot apprehend it by 'knowing',³¹ on account of their deprivation of the light of God. 'We are rightly taught, by true, rational arguments and the Holy Scriptures, that devils, being excluded from the light of God, can never through contemplation arrive at the foreknowledge of future events',³² he asserts. Despite their inability to foresee and, hence, to foretell what will happen, William continues, demons deceive human beings and even themselves by claiming to be able to perform such feats. He writes, 'They impose on the inexperienced through the glammers of divinations and arrogate to themselves a foreknowledge of future events which, in truth, they do not possess'.³³ Because a demon inspired Merlin when he claimed to be able to prophesy and because demons cannot truly prophesy, William concludes, Merlin deceived those who listened to him: 'It is plain that whatever [Geoffrey] published, writing about [...] Merlin, are lies, made up to gratify the

²⁹ 'Eius vaticiniis non audent inserere, "haec dicit Dominus", et erubuit inserere, "haec dicit diabolus"', William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, ed. and trans. by Walsh and Kennedy, I, Prooemium, 14 (I, p. 34).

³⁰ 'Conjiciendo', William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, ed. and trans. by Walsh and Kennedy, I, Prooemium, 4 (I, p. 28).

³¹ 'Cognoscendo', William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, ed. and trans. by Walsh and Kennedy, I, Prooemium, 4 (I, p. 30). This is a distinction that Augustine makes in *Augustine, De civitate Dei*, ed. by Dombart and Kalb, IX, 22 (p. 254).

³² 'Et veris rationibus et sacris literis doceamur daemones, a luce Dei seclusos, futura nequaquam contemplando praescire', William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, ed. and trans. by Walsh and Kennedy, I, Prooemium, 4 (I, p. 28).

³³ 'Cum tamen per divinationum praestigias apud imperitos, quam utique non habent, praescientiam sibi arrogant futurorum', William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, ed. and trans. by Walsh and Kennedy, I, Prooemium, 4 (I, p. 30).

curiosity of the imprudent'.³⁴ Though William is the most vehement of Merlin's critics,³⁵ he is far from the only person to express qualms about the validity of this seer's prophecies at this time. The author of a commentary attributed to Alan of Lille raises the question 'whether [Merlin] was Christian or a pagan and whether the spirit in which he prophesied was divine or pythonic'³⁶ — that is, a demonic spirit like that which inspired the Pythia, the priestess who transmitted Apollo's oracles at Delphi. John of Salisbury speaks with disdain of a contemporary who justified a political position by citing Merlin, sneering, 'He relies on a prophecy of Merlin [...] inspired by I know not what spirit',³⁷ and he speaks with approval of another contemporary who 'knows this prophet to be of worthless authority'.³⁸ Following prohibitions against consulting diviners by the author of the Book of Deuteronomy,³⁹ Augustine,⁴⁰ and Isidore of Seville,⁴¹ medieval thinkers regularly caution that those who attempt to see the future — like, presumably, Merlin — enter into compacts with demons, which are necessarily to their detriment.⁴² By the time of the Counter-Reformation, the Church and, indeed, continental Europe as a whole had definitively turned against Merlin as a result of these concerns. The Council of Trent placed his book of prophecies on the Index, one anonymous commentator of this period explains, because 'It was not filled with the Holy Spirit of God but, rather,

³⁴ 'Liquet a mendacibus esse conficta quaecunque de [...] Merlino, ad pascendam minus prudentium curiositatem, homo ille scribendo vulgavit', William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, ed. and trans. by Walsh and Kennedy, I, Prooemium, 14 (I, p. 34).

³⁵ Despite his scepticism about Merlin's marvels, William does put credence into the tale of the green children of Woolpit, in Suffolk, because of the number of credible witnesses who testified about them; see William of Newburgh, *The History of English Affairs*, ed. and trans. by Walsh and Kennedy, I, 27, 1–4 (I, pp. 114–17).

³⁶ 'Utrum Christianus fuerit, an gentilis: et quo nam spiritus prophetaverit, phytonico an divino?', Pseudo-Alan of Lille, *Explanationum in prophetiam Merlini*, p. 3.

³⁷ 'Fretus tamen est oraculo Merlini [...], nescio quo repletus spiritus', John of Salisbury, *The Letters*, ed. and trans. by Millor and Butler, Letter 292 (II, p. 668). See Deuteronomy 34. 9.

³⁸ 'Prophetae sui fulem novit auctoritatem', John of Salisbury, *The Letters*, ed. and trans. by Millor and Butler, Letter 292 (II, p. 668). See also Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio Kambriae*, ed. by Dimock, I, 16 (pp. 197–98).

³⁹ Deuteronomy 18. 10–11.

⁴⁰ See Augustine, *De genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, ed. by Zycha, II. 17 (pp. 59–62) and Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, ed. by Martin, II. 23. 35 (pp. 57–58).

⁴¹ See Isidore of Seville, *Eymologiae*, Book VIII, c. 9, section 3 (PL 82, col. 313).

⁴² See, for example, Hugh of St Victor, *Didascalion*, ed. by Buttmer, VI. 15 (pp. 132–33).

stirred by an evil demon'.⁴³ For William and his fellow critics of Merlin, there are biblical and Christian prophets, who are inspired by God and who therefore speak the truth, and there are pagan sorcerers, who are inspired by the devil and who therefore speak falsehoods. If Merlin is neither a biblical nor a Christian prophet, as he clearly is not, he must be a pagan sorcerer, allied with the devil.

In contrast, for thinkers invested in contemplative traditions, Merlin's marvels are possibly divine in origin (though not in the same way that miracles are divine) and, hence, possibly truthful. Gerald of Wales, the Norman-Welsh chaplain to King Henry II of England, writing in 1191, admits that genuine knowledge of the future is bestowed by God alone, through his grace.⁴⁴ At the same time, he suggests that this knowledge can be given, not only to biblical and Christian figures of the highest probity, but also to pagans and other non-holy personages.⁴⁵ Ancient texts repeatedly show, he points out, that 'The spirit of prophecy was given, not only to the holy, but sometimes to unbelievers and gentiles'.⁴⁶ The Chaldeans interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream, though they were pagans. Calchas and Cassandra predicted the fall of Troy, and the Cumaean Sibyl predicted the coming of Jesus Christ, though they too were unbelievers. Even today, Gerald testifies, certain Welshmen known as *awenyddion* (in Welsh, 'those who are inspired') — of no special spiritual status — fall into trances, babble incoherently, and yet speak the truth to those who question them. He affirms, 'If you should ask, scrupulous reader, by what spirit such prophecies are made possible, I do not necessarily say that it is pythonic or demoniacal'.⁴⁷ The spirit that enables pagans or other profane people, in general, to make such prophecies is, he proposes, the same as the one that enables saints to utter such truths. Despite the qualms which William and some other clerical writers

⁴³ 'Non cum Spiritu Dei plenum, sed potius malo daemone agitatum', cited in Zumthor, *Merlin le prophète*, p. 113.

⁴⁴ 'Verum, quia sicut solius est proprium scire futura Dei, sic et futurorum scientiam dare, potius spiritu scientiae desuper et ex gratia dato', Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio Kambriae*, ed. by Dimock, I, 16 (p. 197).

⁴⁵ Pseudo-Alan of Lille echoes Gerald's points, noting that Job, Balaam, the Cumaean Sibyl, and Virgil were all allowed by God to foresee the coming of Jesus Christ. See Pseudo-Alan of Lille, *Explanationum in prophetiam Merlini*, Prologus (pp. 4–6).

⁴⁶ 'Quod non solum sanctis, sed etiam infidelibus interdum et gentilibus [...] prophetiae spiritus datus est', Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio Kambriae*, ed. by Dimock, I, 16 (p. 198).

⁴⁷ 'Si autem quo spiritu proferantur huiusmodi, scrupulosus lector inquiras, non dico quod pithonico, non daemoniaco', Gerald of Wales, *Descriptio Kambriae*, ed. by Dimock, I, 16 (p. 197).

expressed about them, Merlin's prophecies were already popular in Welsh before Geoffrey translated them into Latin, and they became wildly popular once they were available in the learned language, as they would remain throughout the Middle Ages. Observers regularly interpreted current events as the fulfilment of Merlin's ancient prophecies, and commentators devoted entire works to mapping out such correspondences. The Anglo-Norman chronicler Orderic Vitalis writes before the end of 1135, 'Some part of the book of Merlin has, I know, already been fulfilled in past events, and, unless I am mistaken, more will be proved true, with sorrow or with joy, by future generations.'⁴⁸ For Gerald and other supporters of Merlin, there are true, biblical and Christian prophets and false, pagan sorcerers, but there are also profane people, like Cassandra, the Sibyl, and Merlin, who utter prophetic truths.

In his *Merlin*, Robert addresses the concerns of thinkers from the rationalist tradition, like William of Newburgh, about the possibly diabolical nature of Merlin's marvels, at first seeming to justify them. Geoffrey of Monmouth had first raised the possibility that Merlin may have been the son of an incubus demon, but he had done so merely by citing one of the counsellors of Vortigern, the king of Britain, who was of this opinion. In contrast, Robert represents the seer unambiguously as the product of this diabolical generation. He recounts how the demons are frustrated that God's prophets have enlightened so many people and, in doing so, have removed them from their power. They therefore conspire to create their own version of a prophet, who will succeed in deceiving human beings and, in doing so, restore them to their dominion. The demons tell themselves, 'We have the power to know all things that are done and said. If we had a man who had this power and knew these things, and if he were with other men on earth, he could greatly help us to trick them'.⁴⁹ One of the demons visits a young woman who, before going to bed one night, has succumbed to anger and despair and, as a result, has forgotten to make the sign of the cross. Taking advantage of her temporary exile from the state of grace, he lies with her and begets this child. Not only does Robert thus establish that Merlin was born of a demon, but he attributes to him traits recognizable to anyone familiar with medieval demonology as diabolical. He writes, 'When [Merlin] was made, he

⁴⁸ 'Merlini libello [...] cuius aliquam partem in rebus gestis intellexi, plura vero ni fallor cum merore seu gaudio experientur adhuc nascitur', Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, ed. and trans. by Chibnall, Book XII, c. 47 (VI, p. 386).

⁴⁹ 'Nos avons pooir de savoir toutes choses faites, dites et alees, et se nos avioens .I. home qui de ce eust pooir et qui seust ces choses, et il fust avec les autres homes en terre, cil les nos porroit mout aidier a engingnier', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 1 (p. 22).

had — and necessarily had — the power and the skill of a devil, like the one who had conceived him.⁵⁰ Like a demon, he is able to know hidden matters, such as the conversation of the midwives who assisted his mother in giving birth to him or the true father of the judge who is trying his mother for having had a child out of wedlock. Though demons were not believed to be omniscient, as God alone was held to be, they were believed to know hidden matters that human beings do not know, whether through the keenness of their intelligence, which is not weighed down by a corporeal body; through the extensiveness of their experience, which is not limited to a mortal lifespan; or through the information they receive from good angels, which is permitted by God in order that they may further his justice.⁵¹ Like a demon, Merlin is able to assume other appearances. Though demons were not thought to be able to create or re-create living beings, as God alone was deemed capable of doing, they were thought to be able to cast ‘glamours’ (*praestigia*), through which they can make themselves and others seem different from what they are.⁵² from Scripture, we know that ‘Satan transfigures himself into an angel of light’.⁵³ Merlin himself admits, ‘I have not lost [the devils’] skill or their art’.⁵⁴ Because Merlin is born of a devil and because he behaves like a devil, not only Blaise, but several characters who have dealings with him fear that he is, in fact, a devil. The midwives whose conversation he reveals exclaim, ‘This is no child but a demon, who knows what we have said’.⁵⁵ The judge’s mother whose infidelity he exposes protests to her child, ‘Fair son, do you believe that devil?’⁵⁶ Other characters fear that, even if Merlin is not a devil, he obtains his knowledge and his powers from the dark side. An unnamed baron complains to Pendragon, Vortigern’s successor as king of Britain, whom Merlin serves as an advisor, ‘That which he tells you [...] comes to him from the devil’.⁵⁷ As both Robert and these characters

⁵⁰ ‘Et quant il fu fez, si ot et dut avoir le pooir et l’enging dou deable, com cil qui l’avoit conceu’, Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 10 (p. 49).

⁵¹ See Augustine, *De genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, ed. by Zycha, II. 17 (pp. 59–62) and Augustine, *De divinatione daemonum*, § 7 (PL 40, cols 587–88).

⁵² See Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, ed. by Dombart and Kalb, XVIII. 18 (pp. 608–09).

⁵³ ‘Satanes transfigurat se in angelum lucis’, II Corinthians 11. 14.

⁵⁴ ‘Je n’ai pas perdu lor enging ne lor art’, Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 16 (p. 72).

⁵⁵ ‘Ce n’est pas enfes, ains est deables qui set ce que nos avons dit’, Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 11 (p. 55).

⁵⁶ ‘Biax filz, croiz tu cest enemiz’, Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 14 (p. 67).

⁵⁷ ‘Ce que il vos dit [...] il li vient de deable’, Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 41 (p. 155).

recognize, if Merlin were to be placed in a category of creatures who know hidden matters and who transform their appearance, it would have to be in the category of demons, who alone in the medieval imaginary share his talents.

While Robert at first seems to justify these concerns about the possibly diabolical nature of Merlin's marvels, he ends up dismissing them, even though, unlike Gerald of Wales, he does not go so far as to affirm their divine origin. There are indications that, though the demons engendered Merlin, they lost control of him immediately thereafter. While Merlin's father is a demon, his mother is a holy woman, who sinned only once and who immediately afterwards repented of that sin. Merlin explains, 'When [the demons] conceived me in my mother, they did not do anything wise, for they placed me in a kind of vessel that could not be theirs. The good life of my mother harmed them greatly'.⁵⁸ And, while the demons bequeathed to Merlin the power to know all that has happened in the past, God bequeathed to him the power to know all that will happen in the future, in recognition of his mother's holiness and the child's own need. 'Our Lord [...] gave me so much of his ability that I know the things which are to come',⁵⁹ he attests. The son of a demon, endowed with marvellous knowledge inherited from his father, Merlin is also the son of a good woman, endowed with marvellous knowledge inherited from his Father. He may continue to possess the devil's skill or art, but, he insists, 'I do not possess it for their benefit'.⁶⁰ So vexed are the demons at Merlin's refusal to use his knowledge to lead people astray that they plot vengeance against him. The demon who fathered Merlin attempts to trick Vortigern's counsellors into having his son put to death and, in doing so, acts, as Merlin explains to these counsellors, 'out of sorrow, because he lost me and wanted you to have me killed'.⁶¹ Yet, even as there are indications that the demons lost control of Merlin, there is no evidence that either his mother or God gained power over him at that time; on the contrary, Merlin's own free will came to govern him in their stead, as it governs all rational creatures. With both the devil and God having participated in Merlin's generation, the text states that 'It remained to be seen to which

⁵⁸ 'Il, quant il me conçurent en ma mere, ne firent pas que saige, qu'il me mistrent en tel vaisel qu'il ne devoit pas lor estre et la bone vie ma mere lor nuist molt', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 16 (pp. 71–72).

⁵⁹ 'Et Nostre Sire [...] m'a doné tant de sa vertu que je sai les choses qui sont a avenir', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 15 (pp. 68–69).

⁶⁰ 'Je nel tieng mie por lor pro', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 16 (p. 72).

⁶¹ 'De duel, por ce qu'il m'a perdu et vousist que vos me feissiez ocirre', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 29 (p. 117).

one he would hold'.⁶² In a movement typical of romance, even as Robert seems to clarify obscure aspects of Geoffrey's narrative, by affirming that, though Merlin was sired by a demon, he turned against his father, he opens up more ambiguities, by refusing to state definitively whether or not he turned towards God at that time.

Addressing specific concerns about the possibly diabolical nature of Merlin's identity, Robert also addresses more general concerns about the possibly deceptive nature of marvels. All Catholics of this time recognized that the ultimate mysteries of the faith, such as the nature of the Godhead, the Trinity and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, are beyond human comprehension. Still, rationalist thinkers, trained in the cathedral schools or the nascent universities, emphasized the degree to which human beings could understand the world around them and even the God who had created this world. Abelard famously announced that 'Nothing could be believed unless it was first understood',⁶³ and the scholastics who followed him provided reasons for why one should believe, for example, that God exists, that the Trinity has three persons, and that Christ redeemed us from our sins. If thinkers like Adelard, Peter Lombard, and Pseudo-Albertus Magnus encourage their readers not to feel wonder at the world, it is because they encourage them to feel confident that they can make sense of what they see, through active and objective inquiry; through the normal, human processes of cognition; and through consideration of the laws of logic. At the same time, contemplative thinkers, trained in Cistercian and other monastery schools, stressed the degree to which human beings could not understand the world around them, let alone the God who had created this world. As the precursor of both certain contemplative and scholastic traditions, Anselm of Canterbury bolstered the former approach to the truth when he famously declared, in contrast to Abelard, 'I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but I believe in order that I may understand'.⁶⁴ While those who adhered to Anselm's sentiment acknowledged that there are aspects of divinity that are capable of being understood and should therefore

⁶² 'Si savra or bien au quel il se devra tenir', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 10 (pp. 50–51).

⁶³ 'Nec credi posse aliquid nisi primitus intellectum', Peter Abelard, *Historia calamitatum*, ed. by Monfrin, p. 83.

⁶⁴ 'Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam.' Anselm of Canterbury, *Proslogion*, ed. and trans. by Corbin, 1. 100 (p. 100). See Augustine, *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus CXXIV*, ed. by Willems, 29. 6 (pp. 286–87). See Isaiah 7. 9 (Vulgate: 'Si non credideritis, non permanebitis').

be appreciated in this manner, they nevertheless chose to stress the irreducible mysteriousness of the Godhead and his operations instead. If monks like Saint Brendan and Bernard of Clairvaux urge their brethren to feel wonder at the world, it is because they urge them to feel appreciation of the God who created that world, through a passive and subjective awareness of this deity; through a recognition of that which resists the normal, human processes of cognition; and through a consideration of that which apparently functions outside the rules of logic. In *Merlin*, Robert speaks of God, Jesus Christ, and, especially, the Holy Grail, whose legend he is instrumental in developing, yet he is not writing a contemplative treatise designed to increase our wonder at its Creator by increasing our wonder at the world, as the author of the *Navigatio sancti Brendani* and Bernard of Clairvaux had done before him. Still, as Anselm instructs his readers not to try to understand, but to believe, Merlin, as we recall, tells Blaise not to try to understand, but to believe; in both cases, the only understanding the speaker expects the listener to attain will be the result of his belief, not the cause of it. In his account of Merlin's interaction with Pendragon (that is, the most original section of his narrative outside the account of Merlin's interaction with Arthur), Robert rejects the rationalist approach toward marvels, which celebrated human beings' capacity to attain truth on their own, in favour of the contemplative approach, which recognizes their necessary reliance upon the assistance of an other for any such illumination.

Like contemplative thinkers, Robert's Pendragon learns that the world is a place that can be known, not through an active and rationalist inquiry, but through a passive and contemplative awareness of the other. As Robert tells the tale, Pendragon has been besieging the fortress of the Saxon chieftain Hengist for many months, and he wants to know whether he will ever succeed in taking it. Five of his counsellors who had earlier belonged to Vortigern's council recommend that he track down Merlin, who had predicted the future for his predecessor and who may be able to do the same for him. Pendragon resolves, 'If he is in this country, I will find him'.⁶⁵ With these words, the king shows himself to assume that he is capable of finding Merlin, if he applies sufficient energy and determination to the task. As he is king, he is able to muster large numbers of men and to send them throughout his realm to look for Merlin. He himself travels to Northumbria and questions a herdsman and a gentlemen he finds there, who claim to have knowledge of this seer. Ultimately, however,

⁶⁵ 'S'il est en cest païs, dont le troverai je bien', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 31 (p. 125).

Pendragon discovers that it is not he who will find Merlin, but Merlin who will find him. The herdsman warns the king, 'Sire, I know that you are seeking Merlin, but you will not be able to find him until he wishes you to find him. Go off to one of your good towns near here, and he will come to you when he knows that you are waiting for him'.⁶⁶ Though Pendragon assumes that, in order to find Merlin, he need only actively seek him, he ends up succeeding in this endeavour by passively awaiting him, in his lodgings in town. The gentleman who visits the king in these rooms asserts that, though the king may be seeking Merlin, he does not need him, adding, 'If you had need of him, he would come to you very willingly'.⁶⁷ Confronted with this gentleman's words, Pendragon protests, 'I have need of him every day. Never have I had such desire to see a man as I have to see him'.⁶⁸ Only after the king makes this statement does the gentleman reveal himself to be Merlin. It is not Pendragon's efforts but his need or desire to find Merlin or, even more, his acknowledgement of this need or desire, that persuades Merlin to let himself be known. In order to find Merlin, it seems, one must not seek him outside oneself, but merely want him inside oneself, because, like God responding to a prayer, he will know of that desire and respond to it. Even when Pendragon's counsellors first tell him about Merlin, they inform him, 'He knows well when he is being spoken of, and, [...] if he wished, he would come'.⁶⁹ As far away as he may be, Merlin is aware of when one wants him or speaks of him, and he reacts to that feeling or those words as he sees fit. Now that he has decided to reveal himself to Pendragon and Pendragon's brother Uther, Merlin informs them, 'Know that, in all the places where I will be, I will remember your works more than any others. And I want you to know that I will not know that you are troubled by anything without coming to help and counsel you in all ways'.⁷⁰ In the enchanted world in which Pendragon now

⁶⁶ 'Sire, je sai bien que vos querez Merlin, mais vos nou povez einsis trouver devant que il voille que vos le truissoiz, et alez vos en a une de voz bones viles ci pres et il vendra a vos, quant il savra que vos l'atandez', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 33 (p. 129).

⁶⁷ 'Se en avoies mestier, il venroit molt volentiers a toi', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 33 (p. 131).

⁶⁸ 'Je ai mestier de lui toz jorz ne onques n'oi si grant envie d'ome veoir come j'ai de lui', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 33 (p. 131).

⁶⁹ 'Il set bien quant l'en parole de lui et [...], s'il vouloit, il venroit bien', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 31 (pp. 124–25).

⁷⁰ 'Mais tant sachiez qu'en touz les leus ou je serai, serai je plus remanbranz de vos oeuvres que des autrui. Et si voil que vos sachiez que je ne savrai que vos soiez encombrez de nule chose que je ne vos en veigne aidier et conseilier en toutes manieres', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 39 (pp. 149–50).

recognizes himself to live, the truth is, not something one attains by seeking an other outside the self, perhaps by travelling to Northumbria and questioning potential informants, but something that is revealed within the self, so long as that self is open to that other and admits its need for him.

Like contemplative thinkers, Pendragon's counsellors learn that the world is a place that can be known, not through an active exercise of one's own powers of cognition, but through a passive readiness to receive information from someone else. The counsellors who had known Merlin in Vortigern's court assure the king, 'Sire, it could not be that, if we saw him, we would not recognize him [...]. We would recognize well his appearance, if we saw him'.⁷¹ As they see it, each person possesses an 'appearance' (*semblance*) by which he can be known to be who he is. In part, this appearance reflects the social category to which the person belongs. Someone who looks like a herdsman or a gentleman, one can assume, is a herdsman or a gentleman. In part, this appearance reflects individual identity within this social category. Someone who looks old or young, crippled or healthy, one can assume, is, in fact, old or young, crippled or healthy. Defined by these social and individual categories, a person's appearance is assumed to be stable across time, so that the counsellors who had known Merlin during Vortigern's reign expect themselves to be able to recognize him under Pendragon's reign as well. Yet, despite their confidence in their ability to recognize Merlin on the basis of his 'appearance', these counsellors fail to recognize the seer when he is in front of them. When they are confronted with this failure, they excuse themselves by pointing out that Merlin possesses an ability to transform his appearance which other human beings do not share: 'Sire, [...] he can do and say that which no others who are now alive can do or say'.⁷² At one moment, Merlin can seem to be a herdsman and, at another moment, a gentleman; he can assume the semblance of an old man and, then, of a cripple. Yet, as Merlin reminds Pendragon, it is not only tricksters like himself but all human beings whose physical appearance changes over time. In one manuscript of this text, he states, 'The things of this world are never always in one state. Thus, as Saint John says, they are mutable, for sometimes people are white and, at other times, black, for it happens that a man who is white at one time becomes black at another because of heat, as is customary for those

⁷¹ 'Sire, ce ne puet estre, se nos le veons, que nos nou conoissons bien [...]. Nos conoistrom bien sa samblance, se nos la veom', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 34 (pp. 132–33).

⁷² 'Sire [...] il puet faire et dire ce que nus autres qui or soit vif ne puet faire ne dire', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 34 (p. 135).

who go on pilgrimage'.⁷³ As people can become tan from the heat, he continues, they can also become green from fear or yellow from jaundice. Young people can become old, and healthy people can become sick. 'And because of this,' he concludes, 'it is not enough to know the appearance of the man, without anything else, for he who knows only appearance knows nothing'.⁷⁴ If one means to recognize someone, Merlin makes clear, one must rely, not upon appearance, but, instead, upon what he calls 'heart' (*cuer*). While the counsellors are deceived as to who Merlin is because they take for granted that what one appears to be, one is, Merlin is not deceived when the unnamed baron adopts a series of disguises because he does not make that assumption. He declares of the baron, 'I know well all his heart and all that which his foolish, wicked heart thinks'.⁷⁵ Like God, who, according to the First Book of Kings, 'alone knows the hearts of the sons of men',⁷⁶ Merlin grasps not just what men look like, on the outside, but who they are, on the inside. Though Merlin reproaches Pendragon's counsellors for relying upon appearance instead of upon 'heart' in knowing people, his point is not that they, or any human beings, should be expected to discern who people truly are, but, rather, that they should admit to themselves that they cannot discern who people truly are and that they must depend upon God — or upon himself — to expose others' identity to them.

Like contemplative thinkers, finally, Pendragon's courtiers learn that the world is a place which can be known through a consideration, not only of what one believes to be possible, but of what one believes to be impossible. At one point in the romance, Merlin makes a series of prophecies that seem logically incongruous. The unnamed baron comes to the seer at three different times, in three different guises, and asks him to foretell his future each time, in order

⁷³ 'Les chouses de cest ciecle ne sunt mies adés an un estait. Ensi comme dist sainz Jehainz, sont muaubles, car aucune foiz est on blanc et aucune foiz noir, car il avient bien k'uns honz qui est blanz en un tanz devient noir en un autre per challour, si comme suelent estre cil qui vont es pellerinaignes', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 34 (p. 133).

⁷⁴ 'Et pour ce ne soufist il mie a connoistre sanz plus la samblance de l'omme, car il ne le connoist mie qui ne connoist que sa samblance', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 34 (pp. 133–34). The base manuscript states simply, 'Ne conoist pas bien home qui ne conoist que la samblance', § 34 (p. 133).

⁷⁵ 'Je sai tout son coraige et tot ce que son fol mauvais cuer pense', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 42 (p. 160).

⁷⁶ 'Tu nosti solus cor omnium filiorum hominum', I Kings 8. 39. See also Luke 16. 15 and Acts 1. 24.

to trick him into making contradictory and, hence, false predictions.⁷⁷ When Merlin complies with the baron's request, it seems that he thinks that he is predicting the deaths of three different men, for he claims, first, that the baron will fall from his horse and break his neck; then, that he will be hanged; and finally, that he will be drowned.⁷⁸ Given the internal contradictions of these three deaths, the baron feels that he has exposed Merlin as a fraud. 'Sire', he tells the king after the third test, 'now you can know well his folly, for he does not know what he says. How could it be said that he speaks the truth when he says that the day I die I will break my neck, I will hang, and I will drown? I know well that all this could not happen to me or to anyone else'.⁷⁹ Because it seems self-evident that someone who has died one way cannot die a second, let alone a third way, it seems self-evident that Merlin's predictions are contradictory and, hence, untrue. According to Aristotle's law of non-contradiction, 'Opposing statements cannot be true at the same time'.⁸⁰ Yet, before long, members of Pendragon's court discover that that which seems logically impossible can also be true. Some time after Merlin predicted his three deaths, the baron is crossing a bridge in the company of a large number of people. His palfrey stumbles and falls to his knees, so that the baron is thrown forward onto the ground, breaking his neck. He rolls off the bridge, but in such a way that a post catches hold of

⁷⁷ In courts at this time, it was not uncommon for high noblemen, like this baron, to bring accusations of necromancy against courtiers of lower birth, like Merlin, whom they perceived as having gained an inordinate influence over their lord. See Kieckhefer, *Witchcraft in Medieval Europe*, pp. 96–97.

⁷⁸ The tale of the threefold death appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vita Merlini*, ed. by Clarke, from around 1153. For its precedent, see Jocelin of Furness, *Vita Kentegerni*, ed. by Forbes, p. 524. For discussion of earlier versions of this episode, see Geoffrey of Monmouth, *Vita Merlini*, ed. by Clarke, p. 12.

⁷⁹ 'Sire, or poez vos bien conoistre sa folie, car il ne set que il dit. Et coment porroit ce estre que il poïst voir dire, quant il dit que le jor que je morrai je me briserai le col et que pendrai et que je neierai? Mais je sai bien que tout ce ne puet avenir de moi ne d'autrui', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 42 (p. 160).

⁸⁰ 'Non esse simul veras oppositas dictiones', Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, lib. I–XIV, ed. by Vuillemin-Diem, IV. 6, 1011b 14–15 (p. 88). In his commentary upon Aristotle, Avicenna anticipates this episode when he states, 'It is necessary that we send the obtuse man into the fire, because he holds that fire and non-fire are one, and that we have him suffer from blows, since he holds that suffering and non-suffering are one' ('Sed oportet ut stolidum mittamus in ignem, quoniam tenet ignem et non ignem esse unum, et verberibus faciamus eum dolere, quoniam tenet quod dolere et non dolere sunt unum'), Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, ed. by van Riet, Tractatus I, cap. 8, 53. 13–15 (p. 62).

his mantle and hangs him by it, upside down, over the edge of the platform. So far does he dangle into the river below that, though his body is in the air, his head and shoulders are immersed in the water. Despite what the baron thinks, the truthfulness of Merlin's words can be determined, not through what seems to be their internal coherence or lack thereof, but through what is revealed to be their external fulfilment in the world. It is because the baron is sure that what seems to be the truth is, in fact, the truth that he rushes to judgement and rejects, precipitously and erroneously, the validity of Merlin's predictions. In contrast, it is because Pendragon does not share the baron's excessive confidence in ordinary human perceptions of the truth that he does not make the same mistake. After the baron had demanded that Pendragon cease to place trust in this seer's words, the king had replied, 'I will not disbelieve them until I know from what death you die,'⁸¹ and his hesitation to accept the initial results of the baron's test is ultimately vindicated. The predictions of the baron's death are not the only words that Merlin utters in a dark manner. In the aftermath of the baron's demise, he resolves, 'From now on, I will not speak in front of people or at court except so obscurely that they will not understand what I have said until they see it happen.'⁸² Robert comments, 'It was then that Merlin began to utter the obscure words out of which [the] book of his prophecies was made, which one could not know until they happened.'⁸³ Indeed, Merlin's prophecies were famously difficult to understand, yet also (for many medieval observers) famously prescient. It may seem impossible for many of Merlin's prophecies to be fulfilled, but one definition of the marvellous is that it is that which seems to be impossible, but which nonetheless occurs: 'It cannot be, but it is'.

In the end, Robert's *Merlin* constitutes a celebration of the pleasures of intellectual humility. While this romance is not a spiritual meditation, it recognizes an other to whom Pendragon, Uther, and ultimately Arthur can appeal, even within the depths of their hearts, when they are in distress and from whom they invariably receive assistance. It recognizes an other who knows, not only the appearances of men, which can so often mislead, but their hearts.⁸⁴ It recognizes

⁸¹ 'Je nou mescrerai ja tant que je saiche de quel mort vos morroiz', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 42 (p. 161).

⁸² 'Ne je ne parlerai plus devant le pueple ne en cort se si oscurement non que il ne savront ja que je dirai devant que il le verront', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 43 (p. 163).

⁸³ 'Et Merlins comença lors a dire les obscures paroles dont cest livre fu faiz de ses prophecies que l'en ne poïst conoistre tant qu'èles fussent avenues', Robert de Boron, *Merlin*, ed. by Micha, § 44 (p. 164).

⁸⁴ Robert makes clear that the Round Table is as extraordinary an institution as it is

an other who apprehends, not only what is possible, but what is impossible — or at least what seems to be impossible — and yet nonetheless happens. Time and again, Pendragon, Uther, and Arthur are forced to acknowledge that, as much as they depend upon this other, they fail to know him in his various guises and, thus, fail to know what they thought they knew. Instead of feeling weak and disoriented at this recognition of the limits of their knowledge, as rationalist thinkers might expect, however, these kings feel delight at the arrival of an other who can supplement their deficiency, usually to a degree far beyond what they could ever have dreamed of. Romance, and this romance in particular, decentres its characters by making them realize how much they do not and cannot know, yet, in a world where so many are shown to be deceived about who they and others are, the realization that one cannot place trust in human understanding itself constitutes a kind of understanding.

because Merlin selects the knights who will join it, discerning, as he alone is capable of doing, not just who is of high birth and great wealth, but who is of great chivalry.

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THE MERITS OF NOT KNOWING: THE PARADOX OF 'ESPOIR CERTAIN' IN LATE MEDIEVAL FRENCH NARRATIVE POETRY

Helen Swift

The idea of medieval love poetry is perhaps most often associated with the lyric verse of Occitan troubadours or Northern French trouvères: fixed-form poems expressing the plangent lament or yearning desire of the unfulfilled lover, such as Gace Brulé's *chanson* 'Desconfortez, ploins de dolour et d'ire' ('Discouraged, full of sorrow and rage').¹ As criticism has readily acknowledged, such vehicles of emotional expression were also vehicles for formal and conceptual experimentation, playing with ideas of poetic composition, such as the paradox of positive creativity proceeding from a negative, dispossessed state, as in Guillaume IX d'Aquitaine's 'Farai un vers de dreyt nien' ('I will make a poem out of nothing at all').² Later, first-person narrative verse developed this capacity for debating ideas within the conventional discourse of *fin'amor*, attesting to an increasing intellectualization of vernacular love-poetry in the period.³ Key to this development was the phenomenally popular thirteenth-century poem *Le Roman de la rose*, started by Guillaume de Lorris as a tale of courtly love and continued by Jean de Meun, a master at the University of Paris, who amplified the story into a vast, 21,000-line exploration of philosophical

¹ *Chanson* XVII in Gace Brulé, *Chansons*, ed. by Dyggve, p. 248.

² In *Lyrics of the Troubadours and Trouvères*, ed. and trans. by Goldin, pp. 24–26.

³ See, for example, Huot, 'The Daisy and the Laurel', p. 241.

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and scientific questions of moment.⁴ Without wishing to impose an unduly teleological reading, it would be fair to say that for poets writing after *Le Roman de la rose*, the expanded intellectual scope of the first-person love narrative enabled literary reflection on a range of epistemological issues.⁵ One such vital question for the lover-persona: to know or not to know whether his lady reciprocates his desire, which may elaborate into a more complicated *how* to know/not know, how to discern her feelings from scant evidence, how to massage this evidence to contrive the longed-for successful scenario or refute signs of rejection, whilst still maintaining a state of yearning that is, after all, the primary motor for the whole enterprise of poetic composition. The medieval lover lives, and therefore writes, in hope: that potent and yet insubstantial blend of longing and fear that renders the quest for knowledge an emotion-fuelled cognitive craving.

For lover-personae in late medieval French narrative poetry, love brings profound instability. It was widely acknowledged amongst poets and commentators on the effects of amorous desire that it risks impeding cognition and derails a man from his normal ('correct') path;⁶ as the Thin Knight in Alain Chartier's *Le Debat de deux fortunés d'amours* (c. 1416–17)⁷ states:

⁴ On *Le Roman de la rose* itself, see Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*. Whilst recognizing that one should exercise caution in asserting 'phenomenal' popularity in relation to a medieval work, it seems fair to single out *Le Roman de la rose* for such an accolade given the number of surviving copies (over three hundred and twenty) and the evidence for its influence on subsequent writers: see McWebb, ed., *Debating the 'Roman de la Rose'*; Badel, '*Le Roman de la rose*' au quatorzième siècle.

⁵ There has been much recent scholarly interest, fostered by an AHRC-sponsored project, in the relationship between poetry and knowledge in late medieval France <<http://www.mml.cam.ac.uk/french/poeticknowledge>> [accessed 09 March 2013], and Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*.

⁶ Contemporary medieval commentators are, therefore, rehearsing arguments that may be found diversely in much earlier sources, such as Aristotle, Lucretius, and Augustine. Perhaps the most elaborate medieval vernacular exposition of how the amorous subject should attend to his mental well-being and avoid pitfalls of error, madness and deception, is provided by Évrart de Conty's *Le Livre des eschez amoureux moralisés* (for which, see later in this essay).

⁷ In *The Poetical Works of Alain Chartier*, ed. by Laidlaw, pp. 158–95. English translations of all texts are my own, unless stated otherwise. The image of derailment from a correct path is rendered variously across a range of texts, especially those dealing with cognitive or spiritual peregrination, such as Guillaume de Deguileville, *Le Pèlerinage de vie humaine* (1330–01, rev. 1355), a spiritually corrective re-writing of *Le Roman de la rose*. Frequently used verbs to depict a figurative straying from the right path or taking a wrong or false direction are *forvoyer* and *errer*; similar imagery is present, for example, in Richard of St Victor, *Benjamin minor*, in which he deprecates the sensual imagination's 'wandering' (*evagatio*) (PL 196, col. 19B).

[...] Amours fait cuer d'amant bestourner
 Et de son droit estat le destourner
 (*Le Debat de deux fortunés d'amours*, ll. 1068–69).

[...] Love makes a lover's heart go off course and deviate from its proper condition.

He concludes his ensuing catalogue of love's effects by affirming that

[Amours fait] seurté doubter
 Et en doubte seurement se bouter,
 A son preu sourt, son contraire escouter,
 Volenté croire et raison rebouter
 (*Le Debat de deux fortunés d'amours*, ll. 1075–78).⁸

[Love makes] one doubt certainty and enter doubt with certainty; it makes one ignores one's friend and heeds one's enemy, trust one's will and reject reason.

The interlocking wordplay (traductio of *seurté/seurement* and *doubter/doubte*, and annominatio of *bouter/rebouter*) of his commentary, emphasizing cognitive confusion, prefaces an enumeration of oxymorons that is typical of medieval discourse on erotic desire: love is contradictory — 'sorrowful joy', 'bitter sweetness' — and mingles hope with suspicion: 'certain espoir de souspeçon meslé' (certain hope mingled with suspicion) (*Le Debat de deux fortunés d'amours*, l. 1093). One could, therefore, easily pass off this lover's lament as an unremarkable recycling of established commonplaces. However, there is a noteworthy tension between the effects he lists. On the one hand, love turns everything topsy-turvy — hence the love-stricken man's confidence in his enemy and mistrust of his friend; things are not so much uncertain, therefore, as soundly inverted. On the other, love engenders doubt and clouds hope, which makes things unclear and unsure either way. The present essay wishes to explore in more detail the way poets developed this latter, more ambiguous state as a key element of their lover-personae's condition, with particular regard to the nature and role of hope.

The lover-personae with which we are dealing are thus unrequited lovers who long for, but never attain fulfilment — a state of affairs that accounts, in fact, for the vast majority of so-called *amants* in *dits* and *débats* of the late four-

⁸ In Old French, the prevailing sense of *doubte* is 'fear', though 'doubt' or 'uncertainty' (the primary modern meanings) are also current, at least in Middle French. The contexts in which *doubte* features in quotations throughout this article will be used as a guide to which meaning is intended: for instance, the collocation and intended antithesis with *seurté* here indicates 'doubt' rather than 'fear'.

teenth and early fifteenth centuries, from Jean Froissart to Alain Chartier.⁹ The composers of these poems express, through their characters' mental and emotional agitation,¹⁰ a keen interest in epistemology, specifically as regards the psychology of human knowledge: the individual human subject is presented as a flawed character, one who strives to know something, but whose approach is faulty. The desiring lover is a perfect vehicle for such psychological probing, not least given the amount of time (and thus poetic space) that he accords to recounting his cogitations. He wants to know whether his lady returns his affections, which does not always equate with wanting to know the truth, given the risk (presented in many cases as the likelihood) that she may not reciprocate. What he wants to know, therefore, is that his investment in loving his lady has been worthwhile — he wants to be proved right, and his mistake is often to equate his subjective wish for positive knowledge (his hope) with objective truth.¹¹ Hope, fuelled by erotic desire, is the motor for this epistemological drive. It would seem from the foregoing summary that uncertainty is the condition from which the lover seeks relief; hope is, he hopes, his way to surety, as Deschamps's persona remarks in his ballade 413:

[...] c'est un piteux wacarmes,
Quant on n'en peut avoir seur estat:
Plus a de griefz en amours que en armes.¹²

⁹ *Dit* is an umbrella term for a form of later medieval narrative poetry which is anchored in a first-person, usually masculine subjectivity. It is often about love (hence *dit amoureux*), and characteristically injects a note of comedy into its treatment of the *je*, whether he is presented as the amorous subject or, for instance, overhears another's love lament. Dialogue and debate are frequent features of the *dit*, which makes it problematic to make any definitive distinction between *dit* and *debat*, since there is, equally, usually a measure of narrative in a *debat*, introducing the scenario and the participants and establishing a witnessing *je*. The late medieval master of the *dit* is seen to be Guillaume de Machaut, whose œuvre comprises no fewer than nine illustrious examples of the form. Our primary attention is directed towards the lesser studied, but equally fascinating *dits* of Jean Froissart and Alain Chartier.

¹⁰ It is difficult, even inappropriate, to make clear distinction between 'mental' and 'emotional' which would correspond to a modern dichotomy of head and heart; in medieval thought, the mind and the body are not distinct entities. See, for instance, Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories*, p. 506, n. 12. In vernacular literary contexts, human understanding (*entendement*) does not have a discrete location in the body/psyche.

¹¹ Armstrong and Kay, in their introduction to *Knowing Poetry*, are careful to specify that they as critics are not endorsing the idea that knowledge has truth value (p. 20); this is, however, precisely the (mistaken) equation made by several lover-narrators of medieval *dits*.

¹² Deschamps, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Raynaud and Queux de Saint-Hilaire, ballade 413, ll. 28–30 (III, pp. 214–15).

It is a pitiful state of affairs when one can't be certain of things; there's more harm to be suffered in love than in war.

But there are merits in maintaining this state of uncertain knowledge; as Congreve remarked, 'Uncertainty and Expectation are the Joys of Life'.¹³ By (wilfully) maintaining uncertainty, one ensures that everything remains still possible and *hopeful*, and lover-personae excel in their imaginative stratagems for cultivating possibility and, not infrequently, for equating such possibility with certain knowledge. There is ambivalence, then, from the lover's perspective, but more unequivocal gain from the author's point of view, given the creative potential for poetic development of an uncertain state, especially in the context of late medieval narrative poetry's predilection for deferral or obfuscation of resolution.¹⁴ For example, the debate in *Le Debat de deux fortunés d'amours* is, in the absence of the 'noble count' (l. 1224) who could have served as arbitrator, submitted to an indeterminate extratextual audience for judgement: 'Qui mieulx sçaira, le demourant supplie' (l. 1242). Whoever may 'know' better is invited to complete it.¹⁵

What *we* hope our investigation of lovers' states of uncertainty will enable us to uncover is three-fold. First, we shall probe the workings of *espoir* in quests for knowledge in the late medieval *dit*, the poetic genre marrying erotic and intellectual desires. Chartier's Thin Knight seems to posit unproblematically the idea of 'certain espoir', which is complicated into a doubting state only by the incursion of 'souseçon'; but can hope itself be certain? We shall consider in what contexts the collocation appears paradoxical and in what senses it is

¹³ The line is spoken by Angelica in *Love for Love* (1695), in Congreve, *The Works*, ed. by McKenzie, IV. xx. 6 (I, pp. 247–391).

¹⁴ For this resistance to closure as a deliberate poetic strategy, see Armstrong, *The Virtuoso Circle*, pp. 11–12; Cayley, 'Drawing Conclusions: The Poetics of Closure'. In the specific context of love poetry, one might also highlight contemporary predilection for versified litanies of oxymorons on the effects of desire, which prevent resolution through their holding in tension of antitheses, such as 'joyful sorrow'. Later in the fifteenth century, François Villon plays on this tangling of contraries (including 'je riz en pleurs [...]') in his so-called *Ballade des contradictions*, which includes the famous line: 'Riens ne m'est seur que la chose incertaine' ('I am sure of nothing except uncertainty') (Villon, *Poésies*, ed. by Thiry, p. 277, l. 11)

¹⁵ We note the choice of verb here as *savoir* rather than *connaître*, which should perhaps be rendered more precisely as: 'whoever has the better know-how'. Knowledge in act rather than knowledge as content is being evoked here, which fits with the idea of deferring the act of concluding the poem: the *je* (ostensibly) yields to anyone who may have superior skills in knowing how to resolve the debate rather than to someone who simply knows more about the subject-matter.

congruent. Second, we shall cast fresh light on the constitution of the first-person persona as poetic subject; the *dit amoureux* has been characterized as 'an investigation of self',¹⁶ and we propose that the operation of forces of desire and hope in these poems reveals, in fact, a very uncertain self: an unstable subject of no fixed self-hood with no single consciousness producing its subjectivity. Finally, our study will contribute to the recent swell of interest in the relationship between poetry and knowledge in late medieval France.

Having referred to the lover-persona as 'he' thus far, our initial focus will, in fact, be a female speaking subject, in Alain Chartier's *Le Livre des quatre dames* (1416).¹⁷ Chartier's acute interest in processes of human perception and understanding is most clearly demonstrated in his later prose work *Le Livre de l'Esperance* (c. 1430), with its dramatization of melancholy's assault upon the narrator's imagination. However, more than a mere token nod towards psychological concerns is evident in his earlier poem, which stages a debate between four ladies as to who suffers the greater grief in the aftermath of Agincourt and its consequences for their respective lovers. The third lady to speak, whose betrothed is missing, is uncertain because she does not know what has become of him:

Las! Congnoissance
N'ay se m'amour et ma fiance
Est mort, prins ou mis a finance
(*Le Livre des quatre dames*, ll. 2166–68).

Alas! I don't know whether my love and my trust is dead, captured or cashiered.

Chartier uses this particular circumstance in order to extrapolate a more general reflection on the psychology of human uncertainty, especially in the context of love. The third lady expounds the nature of her grief:

Entre espoir et desesperance
Ainsi chancelle,
Plaine de doubtes, comme celle
Qui a douleur et ne scet quele.
Je ne sçay quel nom je m'appelle:
Ou d'amours veufve,
Ou prisonniere. [...]
[...]
Se j'ay Esperance, elle est vaine

¹⁶ Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, p. 199.

¹⁷ In *The Poetical Works of Alain Chartier*, ed. by Laidlaw, pp. 198–304.

Et ne puis perdre espoir sans paine,
 Ne je ne sçay quel dueil je maine.
 Bien souvent songe
 Sa mort que mon cuer de dueil ronge,
 Puis faiz de la prison mon songe,
 Et ne sçay lequel est mensonge.
 Ce qui l'empesche
 Est mort ou prison trop griesche;
 Ce sçay je bien, l'un des deux est che.
 [...]
 [...] avoir certain jugement
 De son mal est l'abregement
 Des douleurs et l'alegement
 (*Le Livre des quatre dames*, ll. 2169–75, 2183–92, 2199–201).

I oscillate between hope and despair, full of doubts, like one who has a pain but doesn't know the source. I don't know by what name to call myself: whether a widow or a prisoner of love [...] [...] If I have hope, it is vain, and [yet] I cannot lose hope without suffering, nor do I know what sort of grief I am enduring. Very often I dream that he is dead, such that my heart is tormented by grief; then my dream becomes one of prison, and I do not know which is false. What obstructs him is either death or a terrible imprisonment; this I know well, one of these is the case. [...] Having certain knowledge of one's ill diminishes and alleviates the pain.

The lady's syntax freely enjambs the verse form, in long, complex sentences. Her uncertainty is underscored by repetition of the remark 'ne sçay (le)quel' (I do not know what/which), which culminates ironically in the pathos-inducing single-line phrase expressing the one thing she does know (l. 2192): that her betrothed is either captured or killed; in other words, even on this point her knowledge is not certain. Having related her oscillation between hope and despair, she elaborates further on her state of hopefulness: she perceives its vanity whilst recognizing that she cannot dismiss hope without incurring suffering. From vain hope she moves to speak of dreams — a progression whose aptness is revealed through the homophonous rhyme 'mon songe'/'mensonge'.¹⁸ Indeed, this section of her monologue is framed by hope's vanity and the deceptiveness of dreams, except that the lady herself does not make this connection. Her argument considers whether death or prison is her lover's true fate, but does not

¹⁸ Occurrences of this rhyme pair are very frequent in medieval French dream-vision poetry, which debates the value of the oneiric experience that it relates. See Blumenfeld-Kosinski, 'Remarques sur *songe* / *mensonge*'.

itself interrogate the truthfulness of dreams,¹⁹ whereas the rhyme scheme does. One could, in fact, see *songe* itself as a mode of uncertainty, given the reputation it has accrued through later medieval poetry, from *Le Roman de la rose* onwards, as either/both a reliable or/and an untrustworthy vehicle of communication. Writers seem to have been keen to experiment with the familiar true-false dichotomy of *songe* to innovate new states of semi-consciousness. *Dorveille/dormeveille* is frequently the state of late medieval first-person narrators as they negotiate the value of visionary experience on a scale between truth and falsehood that seems most often to rest somewhere in the middle in the creative uncertainty of 'possibility', whether hopeful or doubtful.²⁰ Chartier's lady's questioning of her lover's fate — his identity as killed or captured — clearly also impacts on her own selfhood; as a corollary of lack of knowledge as to his condition, her own identity is undecided: is she a widow or prisoner herself?

Her pathos-inducing play on conventional 'prisoner of love' rhetoric (touching her own situation as potentially the lady-love of a literal prisoner) is one indication of how Chartier's third lady in *Le Livre des quatre dames* is addressing a broader context of experience than her own specific case. She depicts the influence and effects of Love as a hypostasized force on her emotional and mental state:

Maiz forte amour
 Qui ne veult qu'en ce point demour
 Me fait enquerre sans demour
 Ce que j'ay de savoir cremour.
 Pour esprouver
 Les cuers ou n'a que reprouver,
 Amours fait querir et rouver
 Ce qu'on ne vouldroit pas trouver.
 En ceste doubte
 S'arreste ma pensee toute
 (*Le Livre des quatre dames*, ll. 2214–23)

But powerful love, which does not want me to remain in this position, makes me ask without delay after that which I am afraid to know. To test hearts in which there is nothing to reprove, Love makes us seek and search for that which we do not wish to find. In this state of fear my every thought is fixed.

¹⁹ Though one could argue she does so implicitly by questioning which *of the dreams* ('lequel') is true, thereby implying that dreams can be true or false.

²⁰ See Marchello-Nizia, 'La Rhétorique des songes'.

Repetition of lexical items (annominatio of *esprouver/reprover* and traductio of *demour/demour*) reinforces the lady's position of being stuck: love motivates her to seek incessantly the knowledge that she is fearful of learning, to look for what she does not want to find, in order to move her beyond her current state of uncertainty; but instead, she remains there, with doubt being posited as a substantive position, a location in which her mind is lodged. The ostensible *enjeu* of *Le Livre des quatre dames*'s four-way debate being to establish who suffers the greatest grief, the third lady stakes her claim to this title by explaining that uncertainty entails the most acute, in fact redoubled pain:

Et s'on dit, 'Quel mal est le tien?'
 Les deux d'elles, je les soustien.
 L'adversité
 Court si que par nécessité
 J'ay l'un des maulx en verité,
 L'autre en doubte et craintiveté.
 Je souspeçonne
 Les deux; nulle part ne m'est bonne.
 Souspeçon toujours me foisonne;
 C'est dangier pour toute personne
 (*Le Livre des quatre dames*, ll. 2232–41).

And if someone says: 'Which ill is yours?' I endure both of them [i.e., death and imprisonment]. Adversity rules, such that of necessity I have one of the ills in truth, the other in doubt and fear. I suspect both; no option is favourable to me. Suspicion continually grows in me; it is a danger for everyone.

Of the two options, her beloved's imprisonment or his death, she is afflicted by both: one, she recognizes, will actually have happened whilst the other will be felt equally keenly in fearful doubt. 'Fear' is not here opposed to 'truth'; the two experiences are apposed: uncertainty is neither true nor false, nor is it contradictory of truth. This complementarity may also be related to conventions of the genre in which the lady's speech is cast, namely those of the *dit*. As Finn Sinclair has explored, this dominant genre of late medieval narrative poetry 'allows for the communication of a "truth" of experience that is not to be equated with factual detail because it is not located in external reality but in subjective processes of reflection, sentiment, or memory'.²¹ Chartier's lady is dealing precisely with a truth of lived experience: the felt reality of her

²¹ Sinclair, 'Memory and Voice in Jean Froissart's *dits amoureux*', p. 143.

anguish in which the pain of both options is equally true. Her *uncertainty* is, in this sense, *certain*: it is 'held to be true', 'sincere' and 'resolute' as an emotional state,²² as her suspicion accumulates.

I mentioned above a scale *between* truth and falsehood along which one could locate degrees of uncertainty; it is perhaps more accurate now to speak of a scale of uncertainty *separate from*, but perhaps *alongside* that between true and false assessed in objective terms. During the course of the lady's speech, she oscillates between different strains of uncertainty, relayed through shifts in vocabulary: from acknowledgement of objective lack of knowledge ('ne sçay') to recognition of various subjectively experienced inner turmoils of *doubte* and *souspeçon*, albeit mitigated in places by *esperance*, however vain. In the most recently cited passage (*Le Livre des quatre dames*, ll. 2232–41), she inclines towards the most intensely negative disquiet and seems, in fact, almost certain of the worst: finding double despair in both possible outcomes. Her relationship to hope is failing and precarious:

Et triste vivray et mourray
Tresloing en l'ombre
D'Espoir dont j'ay en petit nombre
(*Le Livre des quatre dames*, ll. 2253–55).

I shall live sorrowfully and die in the distant shadow of Hope, which I have in small quantity.

At other points, however, *doubte* is counterbalanced by *espoir*, such that her thought is not so much fixed in *doubte*, as in vacillation between the two:

Dont suis tiree
De deux douleurs et martiree.
Quant la joie qu'ay desiree
Le plus, m'est du tout empiree
Par doubte, voire
Si fort que je ne sçay que croire:
Ou se je doubte, ou se j'espore
(*Le Livre des quatre dames*, ll. 2463–69).

Because I am torn apart and martyred by two sufferings. When the happiness that I have most wanted is totally ruined by fear, so profoundly, in fact, that I do not know what to believe: whether I should fear or whether I should hope.

²² Definitions from Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française*.

This state is more akin to the Thin Knight's 'certain espoir de souspeçon meslé'. But Chartier tosses a further spoke into the wheel of the lady's struggle to know what to believe: the ironic collocation of doubt and truth created by the homonymy of 'voire' (as adverb, meaning 'indeed') and 'voire' (as noun, meaning 'truth'), whose chiming-in at the rhyme with 'croire' indicates a further nuance in the states of uncertainty dramatized by the poem. 'Not knowing what to believe' is significantly different from simple 'not knowing', since the introduction of 'belief' compounds the subjectivity of the subject lacking knowledge (that is, the lady) because of its uncertain relationship to truth, a relationship thrown into question by the rhyme with 'voire'.

Desire is the primary motor in the quest for knowledge, but also a disruptive force, as the lady extrapolates from her own experience to that of others:

Ainsi poursuivent
 Amans leur vouloir et desuivent,
 Desir plus que Raison ensuivent;
 Et mesme leurs semblans les suivent,
 En couvoiant,
 Par un droit chemin forvoient
 Sans estre a Dangier pourvoient.
 Desir n'est que devant voiant:
 Derrier n'a dextre,
 Ainsi ne scet amant son estre,
 Car qui n'est pas de son cuer mestre,
 Du maintien ne le pourroit estre
 (*Le Livre des quatre dames*, ll. 2439–50).

Thus lovers pursue their will wholeheartedly and follow Desire more than Reason; and even their thoughts follow in their company, wandering down a straight path without watching out for Rebuff. Desire is nothing but looking forward: not behind or to the right, thus a lover does not know himself, for he who does not have mastery of his heart could not be master of its behaviour.

She details the psychological trajectory of the typical lover — 'typical' in the sense of 'typically misguided', because, by necessity, susceptible to *misdirection* (*forvoiant*) because blinkered to any wider picture, such as the obstacle of Dangier.²³ Her depiction of a lover's 'tunnel-vision' gaze is pertinent to

²³ Dangier is a regular fixture in the cast-list of personifications in medieval courtly love poetry. He is an obstacle to love, whose most celebrated appearance is in opposition to Bel Accueil ('Fair Welcome') in *Le Roman de la rose*. The issue of how best to translate 'Dangier'

explaining the condition of uncertainty in which any lover, as desiring subject, exists. Desire is simply a relentless looking forward, a force with considerable momentum; it has no substance in and of itself, and thus nothing in which a lover can ground himself. Hence the lady's comment as to the lover's lack of self-knowledge, since he is not master of himself, having yielded rational control to rampant ardent desire. Not knowing himself, he is thus incapable of making any judgement, of establishing any certainty:

Quant Amour forge
 Ses dars ou cuer comme en sa forge,
 L'ardant fume qui regorge
 S'espart par la bouche et desgorge.
 Lors a songier
 Prins a leur fait, car c'est dangier,
 Fautce de sens, vouloir legier,
 De tart entendre et tost jugier
 (*Le Livre des quatre dames*, ll. 2503–10).

When Love fires his arrows into a heart as he casts them in his forge, the burning smoke that overflows spreads through the mouth and is disgorged. Then I started thinking about their position, for it is dangerous, without good sense and with light-minded will, to understand slowly and judge quickly.

The lover's understanding and judgement are impeded. Whilst it is undeniably a commonplace of medieval discussions of erotic love that desire overwhelms reason and thwarts rational thought, what is notable about Chartier's deployment of the topos is his tailoring of it to the particular issue of uncertainty.

The third lady in *Le Livre des quatre dames* offers a protracted exploration of uncertainty as a state of mind. Our analysis has served to introduce several key aspects of late medieval poets' treatment of this theme: the subjective nature of uncertainty as a condition more variable and complex than objective 'not knowing', and which is constituted by varying measures of doubt/suspicion and hope; the impact of uncertainty on the coherence of identity, as a threat to certain articulation of I-hood; the apt genre-context of the *dit* for developing a topic defined by personal experience; the role of desire as the directing motor of amorous questing for knowledge, but the inevitable misdirection of this engine into an uncertain state since it has no substance in itself, but requires

into English (he is variously rendered, for example as 'Haughtiness' or 'Rebuff') is addressed by Haidu, *The Subject Medieval/Modern*, pp. 235–38. For *forvoiant*, see above, n. 7.

nourishment — negatively by fear, which paralyses it, positively by hope, which gives the promise of fulfilment, albeit a promise unfulfilled.

The role of hope in orientating desire towards a positive and certain outcome is dramatized through dialogue between the Lover and the Sleeper in Chartier's *Le Debat de reveille matin* (c. 1420?).²⁴ The despondent Lover is (as yet) unrequited in his affections for a certain lady (l. 118). He presents as a fact 'que pitié n'est pas en elle' (that there is no pity in her) (l. 120) and is equally convinced of his own hopelessness: 'je suis malheureux et maudit' ('I am wretched and cursed'; l. 152). In one light, the role of his interlocutor is to provide compensation for his unfulfilled erotic desire through consoling discourse as the altruistic friend who stays awake, in fulfilment of the code of platonic love: 'un bon amy pour l'autre veille' ('a good friend stays awake for his friend'; l. 39).²⁵ In another light, though, and since the substitute the Sleeper furnishes cannot in fact serve as full comfort, the interlocutor's role is less helpful: it attempts to move his lovesick friend from a state of certainty (albeit an unhappy one) to one of uncertainty — what one might view critically as misguided hopefulness. The seed of hope is planted by the Sleeper's well-meaning assertions of a positive outcome: 'A la fin faut qu'el se rende' ('In the end, she will have to give in'; l. 192),²⁶ his encouraging collocation of 'hope' with 'promise' (l. 236), and his affirmative, future tense statements:

Par Dieu, son cuer s'adoulcira.
 Dame n'a pas cuer d'aymant
 (*Le Debat de reveille matin*, ll. 287–88).

By God, her heart will mellow. A lady does not have a heart of steel.

However, the Lover is not to be swayed from his despair: 'Il me convient en ce point vivre' ('I must live in this state'; l. 246). He does, though, develop an interesting metaphor for the lover's quest for knowledge. In response to the Sleeper's insistence that 'no' does not really mean 'no' from a lady —

Mais soubz un courtois reffuser
 Sont les biens d'amours en embuche
 (*Le Debat de reveille matin*, ll. 303–4),

But beneath a courteous refusal the gifts of love are concealed,

²⁴ In *The Poetical Works of Alain Chartier*, ed. by Laidlaw, pp. 306–19.

²⁵ For discussion of this code, see Cayley, "Avoir la puce en l'oreille": Voices of Desire.

²⁶ There is quite possibly comedy here: whilst we have no reason to question the Sleeper's sincerity, we may deduce some self-interest in his prompt prediction: presumably, cast as 'Le Dormeur', his own greatest desire is to get back to sleep.

— the Lover depicts as a physical search his attempts to ‘locate’ the joys of love:

De long temps a, n’ay sceu ouvrir,
 Ne trouver maniere ne tour
 De ceste embusche descouvrir,
 Ou ma joye est en un destour.
 J’ay esté emprés et autour,
 Mais oncq jusqu’a elle n’avins;
 Et quant j’en vien a mon retour
 Je suis en l’estat que je y vins
 (*Le Debat de reveille matin*, ll. 305–12).

For a long time now, I have not been able to gain access to, or find any way or means of discovering this hiding place, where my happiness lies in a well-concealed spot. I have been near it and around it, but never have I reached it; and when I come back from there, I am in the same state that I was in when I set out.

Drawing implicitly on the imagery of *Le Roman de la rose*, with its castle of Jalousie shielding the lady from the lover,²⁷ he also integrates the familiar misdirection (‘forvoiemēt’) associated with erotic questing, as his searching is revealed as a circular path which has not advanced his case: he is back where he started — stuck:

Helas! Je n’ay pouoir n’espace
 D’aler avant ne de retraire
 (*Le Debat de reveille matin*, ll. 289–90).

Alas! I do not have the ability or the room either to go forwards or to move backwards.

Le Debat de reveille matin’s Lover’s emotional state is akin to the darkest moments of *Le Livre des quatre dames*’s third lady’s despair: certain of a negative outcome, but still suspended in some degree of vacillation. The Lover does, at least, implore the god of Love to grant him fair reward for his constant service:

Or pri a Dieu qu’Il me doint
 Selon le bon droit que je y ay
 (*Le Debat de reveille matin*, ll. 353–54),

And so I pray to God that He may grant me what is rightfully my due,

²⁷ In his reply, the Sleeper immediately references Bel Accueil (l. 313), as if picking up on the implied intertext. See also above, n. 23.

the logic of which being that he *might* deserve his lady after all. Both poems present not knowing, and the anguish of uncertainty that epistemological lack induces, as an undesirable state. Chartier's lady affirmed emphatically that

[...] avoir certain jugement
De son mal est l'abregement
Des douleurs et l'alegement
(*Le Livre des quatre dames*, ll. 2199–201).

[...] having certain knowledge of one's ill diminishes and alleviates the pain.

His Lover in *Le Debat de reveille matin* is equally absolute that his current state is entirely contrary to his well-being:

Vivre en ce point m'est si contraire
Qu'il me fault cuer et corps faillir
(*Le Debat de reveille matin*, ll. 293–94).

Living in this state is such an affliction to me that my heart and body must surely fail.

There seems thus far to be scant evidence of 'the *merits* of not knowing' proposed in this essay's title. However, looking back at the two previous quotations from *Le Livre des quatre dames* and *Le Debat de reveille matin*, we can see that they are not in fact comparable: whilst Chartier's third lady asserts that certainty would be better than uncertainty, *Le Debat de reveille matin*'s Lover does not; he is undoubtedly discontented in his present state of extreme doubt, but he does not go so far as to express a preference for knowing over not knowing.

The benefits of maintaining uncertainty are revealed by Chartier's poetic persona in his fixed-form lyrics. A series of rondeaux express the dilemma of a lover whose uncertainty derives from his timorousness in not daring to voice his love to his lady and thereby ascertain whether she reciprocates:²⁸

Pres de ma dame et loing de mon vouloir,
Plain de desir et crainte tout ensemble,
Le cuer me fault et le parler me tremble
Quant dire doy ce qu'il me fault vouloir (rondeau I, ll. 1–4).

²⁸ In *The Poetical Works of Alain Chartier*, ed. by Laidlaw, pp. 374–86. References to the rondeaux are by way of their number in the sequence. For the manuscript tradition (no single witness features every extant rondeau), see pp. 371–73.

Near to my lady and distant from where I want to be, full of desire and fear both together, my heart fails me and my speech falters when I have to say what I must surely want.

The refrain of the first rondeau encapsulates how ‘arestee’, to use Chartier’s third lady’s term, he has become, mired in inaction as fear disables his desire. Interlocking repetition of ‘[mon] vouloir’ and ‘me fault’ trigger pertinent ambiguity in the refrain’s last line, as it is suggested that the imperative of desire making him want is, at the same time, the failing of his own will — he does not know whether he wants it or not.

Oseray je ja desbucher du tremble
Pour requérir ce qui me puet valoir? (rondeau I, ll. 11–12)

Will I ever dare to leave off my trembling [lit. ‘come out of (a hiding-place in) the trembling poplar’] in order to request that which could avail me?

He posits possibility (‘me puet’), but seems, in asking whether he will dare move out of his current position, also to imply a certain attractiveness to this position as a refuge from which emergence courts the risk of refusal. This attractiveness is made more explicit in rondeau VII; the persona here is in a more positive frame of mind, though still lacking knowledge: he invokes his lady not to deny him ‘ce que je tiens pour mien’ (‘that which I hold to be mine’; VII, l. 4), his psychological state being ‘riche d’espoir et povere d’autre bien’ (‘rich in hope and poor in all other goods’; VII, l. 1). Hope nourishes his desire and is his one ‘good’; he may not possess ‘les biens d’amour’, to quote Chartier’s Sleeper, but he does have one certain possession: hope. And this is, perhaps, too valuable to risk losing, as he recognizes: ‘Si je le pers, je n’avray jamais rien’ (‘If I lose it, I will have nothing at all’; VII, l. 5).

Je n’aime riens tant que le mal qui me blesse.
J’aime trop mieulx l’endurer qu’il me lesse,
Mais que Pitié me retieigne pour sien (rondeau VII, ll. 10–12).

I love nothing so much as the pain that wounds me. I greatly prefer to endure it than that it leave me, so long as Pity keeps me in her service.

He claims to find merit in his state of suffering and would prefer to maintain rather than lose it, unless his lady’s mercy should save him. There is, of course, pathetic irony tingeing his words here, but also emotional truth, especially as the stanza is followed by the refrain ‘Riche d’espoir et povere d’autre bien’, which reasserts the value of clinging onto hope, whilst the rondeau’s circularity of form enacts his suspension in hopefulness. We thus encounter the paradox of

certain hope: it is, to the persona of rondeau VII, a definite possession, something (a 'bien') that he is sure of having. Whilst hope may be the substance that nourishes desire, its own substantiality is, at best, precarious, its essence uncertain. The role of hope in this regard is sketched out by Guillaume de Lorris in *Le Roman de la rose*.²⁹ The desire-inflicted lover's perspective is the same as that of a prisoner:

Esperance confort li livre
 Et se cuide veoir delivre
 Encore par quelque cheance.
 Trestoute autele beance
 A cil qu'amors tient em prison:
 Il espoire la garisson.
 Cest esperance le conforte
 Et cuers et talanz li aporte
 De son cuer a martire offrir
 (*Le Roman de la rose*, ll. 2613–24).

Hope comforts him and he still imagines that some fortunate occurrence will release him. The man held captive by Love has exactly the same desire. He hopes to be saved, and this hope gives him the strength, the courage, and the desire to endure his martyrdom.

As the subject of verbs of consolation in this passage, it appears as if hope is substantively furnishing the lover with material, but the form her comfort assumes is simply that of a promise. This is the 'riche espoir' of Chartier's rondeau VII, which enables the persona to endure present hardship. The psychological vehicle for the fulfilment of this promise is erotic imagination, 'douz pensers' ('Pleasant Thought');³⁰ in *Le Roman de la rose*, the god of Love promises to grant the lover three other 'biens' ('gifts') *besides* hope, but in fact *douz pensers*, the first of these, is still very much tied up with it:

Li premerains bien qui solace
 Ceus qui li laz d'amors enlace,
 C'est douz pensers qui lor recorde
 Ce ou Esperance s'acorde
 (*Le Roman de la rose*, ll. 2641–44).

The first gift which brings comfort to those trapped in Love's toils is Pleasant Thought, who reminds them of Hope's promises.

²⁹ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. by Strubel. English translations are from *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. by Horgan.

³⁰ The other two gifts are 'douz parlers' (Pleasant Conversation) and 'douz resgarz' (Pleasant Looks): *Le Roman de la rose*, ll. 2669, 2716.

He goes on to explain the mechanisms by which *douz pensers* functions as a gift:

[...] a l'amant en son venir
 Fet de la joie souvenir
 Que Esperance lui promet
 (*Le Roman de la rose*, ll. 2649–51).

[...] as he comes, [he] reminds the lover of the joy that Hope promises.

The vertiginous interweaving of temporalities in the god of Love's explanation highlights the uncertain foundation of hope: a tangle of past memory, present thought and future projection, highlighted by enjambment across the rhyme-scheme. According to the syntax here, that the longing lover is made to remember the joy that hope promises him indicates the potency of hopeful thinking to fabricate a memory that is only anticipated in the future and not grounded in experience that has already occurred. Hope is thus presented as making something out of nothing, and doing so in a biased, selective manner ('ce ou [elle] s'acorde' (literally 'that to which she consents'; *Le Roman de la rose*, l. 2644)) that is favourable to the lover's cause. Hope, memory, and thought cooperate in concocting a pleasant fantasy for him;³¹ from his point of view, this confection is imbued with certainty: it is a prediction of reality and the realization of his desire, as when the lover-narrator of the anonymous fourteenth-century *Le Verger d'amour* discusses his pain of unrequited love with Doulx Espoir and Confort, becomes fixated on the thought of his lady, and falls into an exceptional dream:

Advis me fut lors que Desir
 En mon dormant se vint gesir
 Auprès de moy, et Souvenir
 Qui ne preschoi[en]t
 Et doublement amonnestoi[en]t,
 Disans que mes yeulx tost verroient

³¹ Memory and hope operating in the service of desire and in the pursuit of pleasure may be traced back to Aristotle, with particular regard to the lovesick: *Ars rhetorica*, I. xi. 5–11. The production of similar illusions (*simulacra*) of love is discussed, and criticized at length in Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, IV. Augustine condemns the power of the will to induce the imagination to generate thoughts that are not based on memory: Augustine, *De trinitate*, XI. x. 17. See also above, n. 6, and Swift, "Tamainte consolation / me fist lymagination".

La chose que plus desiroient
A regarder.³²

It seemed to me then that Desire came to lie down next to me while I slept, together with Memory, who lectured me and vigorously counselled me, saying that my eyes would soon see the thing that they most desired to look upon.

What occurs in the account of the dream is a multiple traversing of boundaries: temporal, as memory of the past fuelled by desire in the present is made to project forwards into the future; ontological, as the image of his lady is used as an absent, imagined presence to anticipate a real presence and furnish the lover with sufficient reassurance — ‘comfort’ and ‘hope’ — to sustain him in his pursuit. There is certainty because he is working within a closed system, a blinkered wish-fulfilment mechanism whose terms he does not question. As R. G. A. Dolby remarks: ‘When a particular world view is complete in its own terms, its content tightly bound together in a consistent system by rigorous reasoning, it appears certain to its practitioners.’³³

One could definitely argue that our lover-personae’s thinking processes are far from ‘rigorous reasoning’, but the point is that they appear reasoned and logical to the characters themselves. A classic example from Froissart’s *dits* would be the case of the lover in *L’Espinette amoureuse* (c. 1369)³⁴ who posits as certain knowledge his lady’s affection towards him. Her affection, he deduces, is demonstrated by her coming along and pulling his hair, an act he labels confidently ‘cel amoureux tour’ (‘this amorous act’; l. 3823) after a lengthy cogitation on its circumstances: wish-fulfilment-reasoning himself out of doubt: ‘Je prise petit mon eur’ (‘I do not think much of my fortune’; l. 3797), through what he deems to be the inevitable uncertainty of erotic experience (‘Ensi se voellent amourettes | rampronner une heure dures | Lautre moles et debonnaire’; ‘It is thus that love affairs like to play themselves, one hour painful, the next sweet and pleasant’; ll. 3806–08)), towards the (evidence-less) conviction that

[...] ja se ne fust esbatue
A moi que la ert embatue

³² In *Recueil de poésies françaises*, ed. by de Montaiglon and de Rothschild, ix, pp. 281–93 (at p. 286).

³³ Albeit that Dolby is addressing a very different field of study: Dolby, *Uncertain Knowledge*, p. 6.

³⁴ In Froissart, *An Anthology of Narrative and Lyric Poetry*, ed. and trans. by Figg and Palmer, pp. 104–265. Translations of all texts drawn from *An Anthology* are the editors’.

Selle ne mamast je l'entens
 Ensi et men tieng pour contens
 (*L'Espinette amoureuse*, ll. 3824–27).

[...] she never would have amused herself with me, having come in where I was, if she did not love me. I understand it this way and consider myself happy.

He unwittingly discloses his own hope-skewed bias, as he correlates his interpretation of the act with the perspective that most pleases him and supplies his 'plaisance lie': desire-directed hope generates a travesty of knowledge. His apparent knowledge appears doubtful, as Froissart, through the voice of his retrospective narrator, colours with implicit criticism his earlier self's adventures in amorous questing. The reader shares the retrospective, privileged perspective, which identifies how the 'experiencing I' of the lover sets up an epistemological framework that is at once a route to knowledge and a deviation from that route: it has the trappings of apparent logic and careful reflection, but it errs in its application of those tools. And necessarily so: he is, we see clearly, misguided in his interpretation of the lady's behaviour; in order to maintain his hope, he needs to avoid a path to true knowledge (that she rejects his advances) and cultivate an alternative that enables him to conjure with the possibility that she may reciprocate. His intercalated lyrics help to sustain this productive uncertainty that is the avoidance of knowledge whilst at the same time professing the capacity to know. His activity gives an interesting twist to Giorgio Agamben's theorization of the respective relationships between poetry, philosophy and knowledge: 'Poetry possesses its object without knowing it while philosophy knows its object without possessing it'.³⁵ The narrator never possesses his object, in the sense of obtaining his lady or her favour; but he professes to know everything about her and her conduct such that this may substitute for both real knowledge and actual possession. His uncertainty is thus a state that he needs to work hard at nourishing in order to buttress his own existence as a desiring (and a poetic) subject.³⁶ We may recall Chartier's Lover's statement in *Le Debat de reveille matin*: 'il me convient en ce point vivre' ('I must live in this state'; l. 246), whose verb (*convenir à*) may be understood anywhere on a scale between 'it suits me' and 'it is necessary for me' to live in this state.

³⁵ Agamben, *Stanzas*, xvii. The citation features in Armstrong and Kay's introduction to *Knowing Poetry*, p. 21.

³⁶ For discussion of the relationship between hope and poetic composition, see Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, pp. 147–48, who also chart the textual history of hope as a medieval personification (pp. 146–50).

In their introductory discussion of the treatment and portrayal of knowledge in late medieval French poetry, Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay note how: 'Knowledge often needs to be duplication: to know is not enough, one must know that one knows'.³⁷ The same logic applies in an ironic way when a lover-narrator is trying to convince himself that he does *not* know (that his lady is not returning his love); he engages a range of elaborate strategies to validate this state of 'not knowing' or, indeed, redirect it into a more positive state of hopeful uncertainty, of 'maybe knowing (the opposite of what is actually the case)'. Witness, for example, in *L'Espinette amoureuse*, a lover's strenuous attempts to sustain his hopeful desire through a series of imaginative projections of his lady's face onto a mirror that her maidservant has given to him. He claims to see in it 'limpression pure' ('the perfect impression'; l. 2629) of her combing her hair. This being her imagined reflection, he 'logically' deduces that her physical reality must be beside him; whilst he fails to find her, he refuses to dismiss the image as having been generated by his own wish-fulfilment imaginings, declaring with ironic certainty: 'Le pooie pour voir veoir' ('I could truly see her'; l. 2666).³⁸

A similarly effortful attempt to deny actual knowledge is dramatized in Froissart's *Le Paradis d'amours* (c. 1361–62).³⁹ Intercalated lyrics composed by the lover-persona proclaim loudly his lack of knowledge; in a complaint he insists repeatedly that 'je ne scai', like the third lady in Chartier's *Le Livre des quatre dames*. This disavowal in *Le Paradis d'amours* features alongside and in opposition to the knowledge that the lover does, in fact, have, but which does not suit him — namely that his lady refuses him. He admits to Lady Pleasure:

Vous devez tant savoir ma dame
 Que celle que j'ains plus que mame
 Ne voelt avoir pite de moi
 Je nai el que refus de soi
 (*Le Paradis d'amours*, ll. 571–74).

You must know this much, my lady, that she whom I love more than my soul does
 not wish to have pity upon me; I receive nothing but rejection from her.

³⁷ Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, p. 19.

³⁸ We recall the wordplay noted above between 'voire' and 'voire'. The verb to see ('veoir') often features in similar homonymic or homophonic play on discrepancies between truth and the subjective perception of truth.

³⁹ In Froissart, *An Anthology of Narrative and Lyric Poetry*, ed. and trans. by Figg and Palmer, pp. 36–101.

What he is looking for is an alternative way of looking at things, of imagining his position otherwise. Pleasure, in the guise of sage advisor — a pseudo-Philosophy who promises him consolation, performing a similar role to *Le Debat de reveille matin*'s Sleeper — encourages him to let go of the certain knowledge he possesses and open the door to possibility and uncertainty:

Tu sces ou tu le dois savoir
 Bien a en toi tant de savoir
 Quant on a quelque cose empris
 Et de la fin nest nul apris
 A quel chief elle vodra traire
 Soit a bien ou soit a contraire
 On sen doit sagement porter
 (*Le Paradis d'amours*, ll. 635–41).

You know, or you should know, for you certainly have enough knowledge in you, that when one has undertaken something and has no way of learning what end it is likely to come to, either for good or ill, one must proceed advisedly.

She redefines his 'savoir': it is not what he has just told her, and which he said she must know, but is instead a gateway to knowledge that is yet to be introduced by Pleasure's companion — who is none other than Lady Hope. The lover pledges allegiance to this companion and appeals for her to set him on the right track: 'Remettes moi au bon cemin' ('put me back on the right road'; l. 711). Hope professes affiliation with moderation ('atemprance') and related qualities (though not reason, interestingly), but her claims to the lover sound, on the contrary, somewhat immoderate:

[...] mes pooirs est bien ytels
 Qu'il vault lor de .v.^c chites
 Car jai a toutes gens mestier
 Et qui use de mon mestier
 Ja desconfis il ne sera
 (*Le Paradis d'amours*, ll. 791–95).

[...] my power is indeed such that it is worth the gold of five hundred cities, for I have mastery over all men. And whoever responds to my ministrations will never be discomfited.

She guides him into a uniquely positive reading of all that happens: 'Ne tesbahis de riens quaviengne' ('Do not be discouraged by anything that happens'; l. 721), and promises that he will reach his goal: hope seems to furnish certainty.

For the likes of Froissart's lovers, though, 'espoir certain' is a paradox. 'Certain hope' is multiply flawed: first, it marks the distortion of a simple wish for improvement — Hope's imperative to Froissart's lover: 'vif tout dis en esperant mieuls' ('Live always in hope of better'; l. 727) — into the conviction of a definite positive outcome: 'à la fin fault il qu'el se rende', as Chartier's Sleeper advised (*Le Debat de reveille matin*, l. 192). The Thin Knight's formulation of 'certain espoir de souspeçon mesle' (*Le Debat de deux fortunés d'amours*, l. 1093) is itself perhaps gesturing towards a problem with the idea of hope being posited as definite and reliable. Froissart exposes how desperate desire, coupled with dogged determination and blinkered vision generate this perverted epistemology, for example through the rhyming of 'voir' with 'vouloir' in a rondeau in *Le Paradis d'amours* (ll. 890, 895): what the lover states to be truth, supposedly objective certainty ('voir'), is in fact shaped by his own desire ('vouloir'). A second flaw stems from the very nature of hope itself: as noted above, hope, in the context of medieval lyrico-narrative verse, is the result of an ingenious fabrication involving memory and desire; being 'riche d'espoir', as one of Chartier's lyric personae claimed, has no substantive value.

We commented above that the comfort provided by hope is that of a promise. The precise value of that promise can only be defined according to the context in which it is proposed. Whilst it is difficult, even inappropriate, to venture any clear distinction between secular and sacred contexts of meaning in medieval love poetry, one can at least identify points at which poets are clearly conscious of playing on or between distinct registers of experience and epistemology.⁴⁰ Froissart's *Le Joli buisson de Jonece* (1373)⁴¹ famously switches mode at the end of the 'typical' lover-persona's narrative, at which point the lover decides to reject corporeal desire for an earthly lady in favour of spiritual devotion to the Virgin Mary; he presents this enlightened realization as a reorientation of belief and will in pursuit of a surer path, leading to higher knowledge:

Pour ce me vodrai retrenchier
 Que dacroire a un tel crunchier
 Que pechies est qui tout poet perdre
 Je ne mi doi ne voel aherdre.
 [...]

⁴⁰ For example, Guillaume de Deguileville's spiritual re-casting of *Le Roman de la rose's* sensuality in his *Le Pèlerinage de vie humaine*. See above, n. 7.

⁴¹ In Froissart, *An Anthology of Narrative and Lyric Poetry*, ed. and trans. by Figg and Palmer, pp. 268–477.

Humlement je me voel retraire
 Viers la mere dou roi celestre
 (*Le Joli buisson de Jonece*, ll. 5174–77, 5183–84).

Therefore I will wish to back away from assuming any belief that is sinful, which can lose everything: I must not and do not want to be attached to it. [...] Humbly I wish to withdraw towards the Mother of the Heavenly King.

Hope is rendered truly, non-paradoxically certain in the context of Christian eschatology, in which the apparently transfigured persona expresses his hope of finding solace in heaven: 'la ou toute joie maint' ('There, where all joy leads'; l. 5442) through the Virgin's intercession, buttressed by his sure knowledge of the Resurrection: 'Je scai de fi' ('I know with certainty'; l. 5295). Hope is certain knowledge here, in the sense that hope-as-faith derives from or is co-existent with a statement of spiritual knowing. Hope is still in itself not 'certain' in the sense that it does not have substance: it is knowledge-in-act (*savoir*), rather than substantive knowledge as content (*connaissance*).⁴²

In noting that 'espoir certain' stands as a paradox in relation to erotic desire and not when a tenet of Christian faith, do we simply arrive at an unsurprising dichotomy between secular and sacred contexts of knowledge? Not entirely, as at least one writer proposes a middle ground applicable to erotic contexts: 'raisonable esperance' (reasonable hope), a collocation that may itself seem paradoxical in the light of Froissart's Lady Hope in *Le Paradis d'amours* and her conspicuous omission of Reason figuring amongst her virtuous companions. Évrart de Conty, in his extensive prose commentary on the allegorical love poem *Le Livre des eschez amoureux*, writes at length on the delusions entertained by lovers who have erred into wild imaginings. The true lover, by contrast, is wiser:

Nulz sages amans ne doit metre son cuer en amour impossible ne en amour qui ne soit a ly appartenant [...] Et par especial, il la doit telle eslire qu'il en puisse concevoir raisonnable esperance de joïr ent enfin, car autrement il aimeroit son ombre et perdroit son temps.⁴³

No wise lover should set his heart on an impossible love or on a love which is not appropriate for him [...] And above all, he must choose a love wherein he may conceive reasonable hope of satisfaction in the end, since otherwise he would love his shadow and waste his time.

⁴² This distinction amongst medieval treatments of knowledge is noted in Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, p. 17. See also above, n. 10.

⁴³ Évrart de Conty, *Le Livre des eschez amoureux moralisés*, ed. by Guichard-Tesson and Roy, p. 594.

De Conty seems to envisage, in a secular context, a sensible and measured approach, one which estimates the odds of success before embarking on its amorous pursuit. The scenarios he rejects as being antithetical to a wise lover's ventures are precisely those which we encounter in Chartier's and Froissart's poetry — men who fall for unattainable women and cultivate illusory hope of obtaining them, defying knowledge of rejection. An important question is whether De Conty's moralization here is to be interpreted at face value or whether he offers a more knowing, tongue-in-cheek commentary on the portrayal of hope in contemporary *dits*.

Where do De Conty and our medieval versifiers leave us in our thinking about relations between poetry and knowledge? In the hands of many lover-narrators, poetry is a great deferrer of any knowledge that is unwelcome, through its capacity (through many a love lament) to sustain a state of 'not knowing', whether an erotic friction to enhance anticipation or a fearful state of doubt. Throughout this postponement of *connaissance*, the narrator-poet demonstrates, of course, considerable creative *savoir-faire* and is, at least to some degree — even if this is revealed only retrospectively — knowingly constructing a framework that will enable him to err. The multi-levelled narrative structure of late medieval poetry enabled writers to experiment with various levels of comfort and discomfort with senses of uncertainty, depicting a disturbed, unstable 'experiencing I' within a fiction recounted by a more confident and knowing 'narrating I'. Working between different registers of experience, sacred and secular, poets could consider different contexts of certainty/uncertainty for their dramatizations of hopeful expectation. Such dramatizations disclose particular sites of epistemological intrigue to be cultivated by the *dit*'s first-person subject: permutations of 'not knowing' and benefits of uncertainty as a potent state of poetic creativity; varied measures of certainty, and the relationship of certainty to the act of knowing or to the substance of knowledge; disjuncture between knowledge and truth, especially the productive dislocation permitted by a dream-vision framework; and the psychology of hope, as a state of mind that exemplifies an understanding of uncertainty as neither 'knowing' nor 'not knowing', a state that can both preserve one from suffering and necessarily incur pain in its oscillations between anticipation and promise, on the one hand, and doubt and suspicion on the other.

The wealth of lines of intellectual enquiry pursued by these writers and the probing character of such investigations is perhaps belied, at least to a modern eye, by the lightness of touch with which they are treated. However, frequent touches of humour and teasing irony, typically to the detriment of a hapless male lover-protagonist, should not be seen to detract from the serious-mindedness

of poets' philosophical explorations, nor to serve as 'sugar coating' of an otherwise more-challenging-to-swallow pill. These comic fictions are, on the contrary, a singularly appropriate mode for thinking through epistemological concerns, keeping the reader on her/his interpretative toes: whilst s/he is able to share positions of superior knowledge over desire-addled characters, s/he does not yet dismiss their hopeful yearnings as valueless delusions, given the ideas *about* knowledge that they mobilise. Moreover, to refer back to the speaker of Deschamps's ballade 413, 'on n'en peut avoir seur estat': one can never be completely sure — the joke may be on us.

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PHILOSOPHY IN PARTS: JEAN DE MEUN, CHAUCER, AND LYDGATE

Nicolette Zeeman

This essay is about texts that valorise, or attribute a certain primacy to, a subordinate element or process within a hierarchical philosophical or theological system, but without overtly repudiating the philosophical or theological system. It is my proposal that such a move has sceptical implications.¹

At one level, the valorisation of a subordinate element within a larger theoretical system could be seen implicitly to endorse the system that gives the element its significance. Nevertheless, if the larger system is downplayed or ignored, a sustained emphasis on the subordinate part might also suggest a critique or repudiation of the system. Given that this move is not cast in overtly oppositional terms — simultaneously appearing to support the larger schema and throwing it into question — its formulation is to some extent rhetorical and ironic. But the move has substantive theoretical implications. In its refusal to provide an alternative system that would explain or situate its altered emphasis, it implicitly questions the need for an overarching theoretical system, valorising more provisional forms of understanding (it may also, of course, be acknowledging the role of desire or feeling in such choices). The sceptical implications of this move, then, do not just derive from the fact that it throws an epistemological claim into question; they also derive from the very obliquity and inexplicitness of the move, which have the effect of refusing even to

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recognise the claims of systematic epistemologies and their hierarchies. It is, we might say, a gesture of philosophical deferral, a version of *différance*.²

A move of this sort is performed by Chaucer's sexually active Wife of Bath when she tussles with St Paul's high valuation of virginity ('he heeld virginitee | Moore parfit than weddyng in freletee [frailty]').³ She claims that she is content to occupy a lower place in Paul's sexual hierarchy, and the form of her conceptual move is made very clear in two images, of which this is the first:

a lord in his houshold,
He hath nat every vessel al of gold;
Somme ben of tree, and doon hir lord servyse.
God clepeth folk to hym in sondry wyse,
And everich hath of God a proper yifte —
Som this, som that, as hym liketh shifte
(*Canterbury Tales*, III. 99–104).

While appearing to accept the hierarchy of golden and wooden bowls, the Wife flouts the assumptions on which it is founded, revealing that she is happy to be a wooden one: although there are those who live 'parfitly', she says, 'by youre leve, that am nat I' (III. 111–12). Later she compares quality wheat bread and cheap barley bread, and chooses to be compared to the latter: 'Lat hem [the virgins]', she says, 'be breed of pured whete-seed [wheat], | And lat us wyves hoten [be called] barley breed'; according to the evangelist Mark, adds the Wife, Christ 'refresshed' many with barley bread.⁴ Repeatedly committing herself to the lower element of Paul's hierarchy, the Wife implicitly undermines the hierarchy itself. Her images of wooden bowls and barley bread, with their naturalizing, rustic and domestic materiality, no doubt have something to say about her practical attitude to the pleasures of eating and sex;⁵ nevertheless,

² We shall see that, like a number of anti-metaphysical gestures enacted in twentieth-century critical theory, this move does not necessarily entail denying local relations, logics or even desires; on the contrary, it foregrounds them, along with their doubt-inducing implications for metaphysical systematics.

³ Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson and others, *Canterbury Tales*, III. 91–92. Chaucer citations from this edition throughout.

⁴ *Canterbury Tales*, III. 143–46. Jill Mann comments on this refusal of hierarchy in Mann, *Geoffrey Chaucer*, p. 73. For a theological reposte, see Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 322–30.

⁵ Both images derive either from Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, cols 270, 219, or from his *Epistola* 49, *Apologeticum ad Pammachium*, cited in Wilson, 'Chaucer and St. Jerome', pp. 246–47, 250. However, they are adapted to Chaucerian purposes: it is notable that the Wife

their metaphorical and tangential relation to the issue at stake also means that they exemplify the discursive indirectness that both allows the Wife to get away with her questioning of Paul's hierarchy, and yet also makes that questioning especially subversive.

These passages are miniature versions of the move that underlies the whole of the Wife's Prologue, in which she combats clerical misogyny and suspicion of the embodied and material world — along with the systematic epistemology that they presuppose — by exuberantly narrating a life led in the pursuit of sexual satisfaction and material goods. Although, as readers have noted, the Wife's narrative seems at one level to confirm the rampant accumulateness, ruthlessness, and sensuality attributed to women by medieval misogyny, the Wife re-describes these phenomena as a source of empowerment and pleasure, and does so with such gusto, that she effectively throws into question both the misogyny and its accompanying anti-corporeality, converting 'a form of subordination into an affirmation'.⁶

As help me God, I laughe whan I thynke
 How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke! *labour*
 And, by my fey, I tolde of it no stoor. *set no store by it*
 They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor
 (*Canterbury Tales*, III. 201–04).

Committed to what medieval writers often describe as the drive of 'natural' sexuality and the desire for the goods of 'fortune', the Wife embodies them in an aggressively ingenious, rhetorical, acquisitive, and anti-male version of the Ovidian 'art of love'. She uses the iconography of made things (bowls, bread) to figure pursuits and pleasures that are bodily and material, but also cultural, social, verbal, and intellectual; she re-evaluates and espouses on her own terms the elements of contingent experience that misogynist and anti-corporeal value systems usually subordinate. But once again, however militantly expressed, her move remains theoretically inexplicit, the ecphrastic and narrative forms of her speech allowing her to engage with (or refuse to engage with) the Pauline hierarchy of values less by overt opposition than by a lateral gesture of avoidance. At the risk of giving too much intellectual weight to the Wife of Bath's Prologue, then, I propose that there is a sceptical dimension to this move to evade the

excludes the hypothetically offensive third point of contrast ('stercus bubulum', cattle dung) in the discussion of breads attributed to Jovinian.

⁶ Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, p. 115, adapting Luce Irigaray.

theological ‘frame’ — and of course this sceptical move cannot be described as merely anti-philosophical/theological, for the sceptical turn is always at some level both philosophical and theological.⁷

Like Chaucer in the Wife of Bath’s Prologue, a number of later medieval literary writers query a dominant philosophical, theological, or moral paradigm by foregrounding the local systematics, changeability, or contingency of the phenomenological world — and the emotional responses that this world excites. There are various large conceptual frameworks under which these sorts of materials appear, and in literary texts two of the most recurrent are the philosophical/Christian notion of ‘nature’ and the broadly Boethian, stoic, and providential vision of ‘fortune’; these are distinct, but connected, ways of describing a world understood in terms of its mutability — as Daniel Poirion says, the cycle of fortune is itself ‘the symbol of nature, its changes and, indeed, its cataclysms’. Recently, this has been extensively documented by Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay, for whom ‘human immersion in the “natural world”’ — sexual, material and temporal — furnishes both a means to the knowledge that is sought in medieval philosophical poetry and a core of *déconnaissance* within it.⁸ If nature and fortune offer conceptual frameworks for literary attempts to systematize and contain contingency’s most disruptive and dangerous implications, they also offer a space in which the destabilizing forces and local mechanics of those same disruptions and dangers can be acknowledged.⁹

⁷ Long recognised as a version of ‘la Vieille’ in the *Roman de la rose*, the Wife must also be a version of the scholastic philosophers’ *vetula* (the little old woman): see Christophe Grellard, ‘How Is It Possible to Believe Falsely? John Buridan, the *Vetula*, and the Psychology of Error’, above, pp. 91–113. See Miller, *Philosophical Chaucer*, on the fact that the Wife’s position is not some kind of anti- or pre-philosophical pursuit of pure embodiment and its pleasures — she too has a conceptual tradition and her own cognitive and cultural reflexes (pp. 36–81, 191–215).

⁸ Poirion, *Le Roman de la rose*, p. 177 : ‘Le cycle de Fortune, n’est-il pas le symbole de la nature, de ses changements, voire, de ses cataclysmes?’. Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, p. 97 (alluding to Lacan; see also pp. 72–73, 95–97 and passim).

⁹ J. Allen Mitchell has argued that recent criticism has ‘domesticated’ the Boethian notion of fortune: see Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature*, p. 6; on fortune and contingency in scholastic and literary contexts, see also Heller-Roazen, *Fortune’s Faces*; and Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry*. The disruptive elements within nature are acknowledged in Bernardus Silvestris’s *Cosmographia* and Alan of Lille’s *De planctu Naturae*; see Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century*, pp. 152–219; Nietzsche, *The Genius Figure*, pp. 42–114; and Burgwinkle, *Sodomy, Masculinity, and Law in Medieval French Literature*, pp. 170–99.

In this paper I shall be investigating this phenomenon in Jean de Meun's continuation of the *Roman de la rose*, and then, more briefly, in the works of Chaucer and Lydgate. Of course, the claim that Jean de Meun and Chaucer are philosophical, critical and ironic poets will be no surprise to readers of medieval French and English; in recent years the writings of Lydgate have also been recognized as more heterogeneous and conflicted than was once thought. What I want to draw attention to here is a distinct and reiterated, but not overtly acknowledged, anti-systematizing gesture in the writings of these poets: influentially developed by Jean de Meun, it becomes a signature move in the work of Chaucer and his contemporaries and successors.

My reason for attending to this move in literary texts is the possibility that it provides some points of comparison with the sceptical tendencies to be found in later medieval scholasticism. By the later Middle Ages, as we now know, sceptical arguments were widely used as a method of criticizing and evaluating different descriptions of the way knowledge comes about and whether or not it is secure;¹⁰ scholastics such as Nicholas of Autrecourt were prepared to tolerate more hypothetical forms of local reasoning, and arguments based on induction and probability;¹¹ Dominik Perler says that thinkers were prepared to consider 'different types of knowledge with different types of evidence and certitude' and that, in this respect, medieval scholasticism has much in common with twentieth- and twenty-first century epistemology.¹²

However, the Aristotelian tradition had also long been concerned about the status of experience in a world that alters over time — the problematics of epistemology in relation to change and contingency. Aristotle recognized that there was a very real question as to whether or not secure knowledge could be derived from a world that was constantly mutating; he informed his readers that philosophers such as the followers of Heraclitus said that it could not, 'because they saw that all this world of nature is in movement and [...] about that which changes no true statement can be made'.¹³ Although Aristotle repudiated this

¹⁰ Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit*; Perler, 'Scepticism'; Perler, 'Can We Trust Our Senses? Fourteenth-Century Debates on Sensory Illusions', above, pp. 63–90.

¹¹ See Wallace, 'The Certitude of Science'; Grellard, *Croire et savoir*; Denery II, *Seeing and Being Seen*, especially pp. 137–68.

¹² Perler, 'Does God Deceive Us?', pp. 190–91.

¹³ *Metaphysics*, IV, 5, 1010a 5–14 (cited from Aristotle, *The Complete Works*, ed. by Barnes, pp. 1594–95). See also *Posterior Analytics*, I, 31, 87b 30–32 (Barnes, p. 144): 'one necessarily perceives an individual and at a place and at a time, and it is impossible to perceive what is universal and holds true in every case'. Augustine addresses a version of this problem in the last three books of the *Confessions*.

view, he nevertheless held that the highest science was the theoretical branch that dealt not with those things that were embedded in the changeable world, but with things that were 'eternal and immovable and separable'.¹⁴ Similar concerns about what kind of secure or systematic knowledge was possible in the face of changeability resurfaced in scholasticism;¹⁵ Henry of Ghent, for instance, a late defender of divine illumination as the only sure form of knowledge, claimed that an exemplar abstracted from a changeable thing 'necessarily has some of the characteristics of a changeable thing'.¹⁶ For thinkers in this tradition, then, contingent phenomena represented potentially troublesome 'parts' within systematic epistemology.

In the fourteenth century new questions were being asked about the relation of knowledge to issues of temporality, contingency, and possibility, and modal logic allowed thinkers to explore the hypothetical consequences of these freshly formulated questions.¹⁷ Such a milieu seems to have encouraged a particular version of the theological and philosophical 'part', in the form of local thought-experiments in which philosophers explored the logical consequences of particular propositions, without necessarily feeling the need to situate them within larger systems of theological or philosophical understanding. In many cases these thought-experiments were catalysed by the recognition of God's absolute power to act in ways that might disrupt the larger 'ordained' systems by which in normal circumstances nature and divine-human relations were thought to function; but the exploratory exercise of reason continued also to be provoked by pervasive interest in the nature of contingency itself. As Hester Gelber has shown, such intellectual experiments were frequently undertaken through the *ars obligatoria*, the practice whereby one of two opponents accepted a proposition (however counter-factual or absurd) for the duration of the engagement, and then had to respond to subsequent propositions from his opponent all the while keeping logical consistency with the first proposition; interestingly, the whole process until the conclusion of the *obligatio* was

¹⁴ *Metaphysics*, VI. 1, 1026a 6–32 (Aristotle, *The Complete Works*, ed. by Barnes, p. 1620); compare Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus IX*, ed. by Mutzenbecher, pp. 16–17.

¹⁵ Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit*, pp. 20–22 and passim.

¹⁶ *Summa quaestionum ordinarius* a. 1, q. 2, D, translated in *The Cambridge Translations of Medieval Philosophical Texts III*, ed. by Pasnau, pp. 119–20; see also *Summa quaestionum ordinarius* a. 1, q. 1, IV (pp. 102–08); and Pickavé, 'Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus on Skepticism'.

¹⁷ See Knuuttila, 'Modal Logic'; Normore, 'Future Contingents'; and Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*; see also Heller-Roazen, *Fortune's Faces*; Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*.

understood to take place out of time, or, rather, in a single instant of time.¹⁸ Such logical exercises, with their pursuit of local systematics and contingent consequences, but their refusal of larger systematics, were pursued as ends in themselves, and provide intriguing, if rather more intellectually abstruse, parallels with the anti-systematizing moves that interest me in the literary texts of the period.

Another version of the anti-systematizing move can be found at moments when the teachings of different medieval 'sciences' seem to contradict each other. Joan Cadden says that 'puzzlement, tension and disagreement about the definitions and relations among the disciplines' can be seen not only in later medieval debates over the ambits of theology and philosophy, or grammar and logic, but also in discussions of the difficult implications of developments in astrology, medicine, and natural philosophy for ethics and theology. Difficulties in adjudicating 'the borders of natural philosophy' have been illustrated by both Cadden and Bonnie Kent, who have explored discrepancies between the sexual desires and activities that medicine and natural philosophy considered 'natural', and the sexual desires and activities that theology and ethical teaching considered moral.¹⁹ Given the natural, sexual concerns of some of the literary texts I shall be looking at, it is perhaps not entirely coincidental that medicine and natural philosophy also provide such notable instances of disciplinary friction and disjuncture — local 'parts' that no longer seem to fit into an epistemological 'whole'.

Jean de Meun's influential continuation of the *Roman de la rose* illustrates the stratagem that interests me in vivid and extreme forms. Jean's whole project, after all, is to undermine the cultural 'epistemology' (if I can call it that) of *fin' amors* to be found in Guillaume de Lorris's unfinished *Roman de la rose*. Jean situates the mechanics of natural sexual reproduction at the centre of Guillaume's courtly narrative of erotic deferral and stasis, thus giving primacy to the (hetero)sexual action that is only ever a peripheral or suppressed element in Guillaume's text. Sarah Kay has observed that the unacknowledged tension in Jean's *Roman* is always between 'what is central, and what is marginal';²⁰ and, indeed, here Jean undermines the *fin' amors* cultivation of unsatisfaction by placing what was marginal to it (the contingencies of sexual relations) centre-

¹⁸ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, pp. 139–49.

¹⁹ Cadden, "Nothing Natural is Shameful" (citation p. 67; also pp. 72, 88); Kent, 'On the Track of Lust'. See also the debates referenced in Maclean, 'The "Sceptical Crisis" Reconsidered', n. 33.

²⁰ Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, p. 65; I am much indebted to this book.

stage. And yet, because Jean's text masquerades as a continuation of Guillaume's narrative, he appears to keep the conceptual 'frame' of Guillaume's narrative in play, undermining it without ever acknowledging what he is doing; indeed, we might say that he manages to avoid acknowledging the epistemological claims of frames *tout court* — whether those of Guillaume, or anyone else. It is this evasiveness, both about epistemological system, and also about oppositionality itself, that seems to me fundamentally sceptical in effect — and so different from the knowledge-producing Aristotelian and scholastic logic of contradiction and contraries, to which Jean comically alludes at a late moment in the poem.²¹

This relates to another relativizing feature of Jean's text. Although many of his personifications — Resons, Amis, la Vieille, Faus Samblant, Nature, Genius — lay claim to a distinct agenda and philosophical perspective, they rarely engage with each other, instead merely giving way to each other in sequence. Although Jean's philosophically oriented allegorical narrative allows him to associate each of his personifications with a particular conceptual position and epistemology, there is, nevertheless, no requirement for an over-arching synthesis. This refusal to negotiate between the speakers' different epistemologies reinforces the work's tendency towards conceptual fragmentariness — and its refusal of philosophical systematics.

For Jean even subverts the simultaneously Christian, Neoplatonic, and Aristotelianizing theory of nature with which he appears to have replaced Guillaume's *fin' amors*.²² Sarah Kay has described Jean's treatment of nature in terms of two contradictory moves, a neo-Platonizing, Boethian move 'upwards', towards more spiritual goods, and another, 'flagrantly provocative shift downwards, from the head (Raison) to the genitals', which she sees as exemplary of Aristotelian scholastic naturalism.²³ However, the tensions within Jean's vision of nature could be described, not in terms of contraries, but in terms of whole and parts: in terms of an unstable relation between a systematic and synthetic vision of a propagatory Christian 'nature' (one that is in many

²¹ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. by Strubel, ll. 21577–86.

²² Although this version of nature draws on antique and Neoplatonist thought, 'L'aristotélisme, se répandant à l'Université de Paris, en précise les vues dans un sens plus mécaniste'; see Poirion, *Le Roman de la rose*, p. 183; and pp. 121–44, 174–200; also Paré, *Les Idées et les lettres au XIII^e siècle*; Gunn, *The Mirror of Love*, Chapters 11 and 12; Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, p. 100.

²³ Kay argues that Jean juxtaposes Platonic and Aristotelian views of Nature, producing 'a sceptical response to twelfth-century models' (Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, pp. 91, 95–100, 113). Kay draws on Polak, 'Plato, Nature and Jean de Meun', p. 96.

respects both Platonizing and Aristotelianizing) and various local visions of its component parts — which Jean repeatedly exaggerates in such a way that they no longer seem to fit into the system. Death, for instance, which should function as a partial cause within the procreative ‘system’, is in fact a voracious destroyer; sex, which should be the mechanism of procreation, seems to have turned into an end in itself; even the supposedly supportive ‘arts of love’ return in the sinister and calculating forms of Amis, la Vieille, Faus Samblant and the (rapist?) lover — revealing that they have been, at best, all along an ‘art of seduction’.²⁴ Jean’s version of the local mechanics of natural sexuality puts extreme pressure on the philosophy of nature by which it is notionally framed.

This can be illustrated from Genius’s sermon to the assembled army of Love, just before the conquest of the rose.²⁵ Here Genius explains that the garden of love in Guillaume’s *Roman* is nothing in comparison with his beautiful ‘park’ — ‘Ou les berbis conduist o li, | Saillanz devant par les herbiz, | Li filz de la virge, berbiz | O toute sa blanche toison’ (‘where the Virgin’s son, with his pure white fleece, brings the sheep with him, gambolling among the plants’; ll. 19940–3). This is an eternal park of exemplary Nature, watered by a trinitarian spring, where the grass and flowers never wither, the day never passes and time never changes; the park seems to presuppose perennial species replication, and can only be entered by participating in sexual reproduction. But although apparently a park of naturally reproducing exemplars, it is also a version of heaven (hell is outside), and those who enter it are not exemplars, but individuals (parts, in other words, of the whole species). Jane Chance Nitzsche’s comment that in this park ‘man can achieve immortality — generic or individual’, replicates this bizarre synthesis, with its conflation of reproductive immortality (exemplars) and salvation (individuals).²⁶ Genius cements this apparent synthesis of part with whole with what look like perfectly orthodox instructions to virtue alongside the sex:

²⁴ On deception in the continuation, see Stakel, *False Roses*.

²⁵ Nitzsche describes Genius as a ‘god of human nature’, both representing the descent of the soul into the body and also the body’s sexual regenerative processes: Nitzsche, *The Genius Figure*, p. 115; Kay stresses Genius’s reference to the multivalent range of the soul’s ‘imaginative’ powers: Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, pp. 89–90.

²⁶ Nitzsche, *The Genius Figure*, p. 125; also pp. 117–19; on this issue, see also Paré, *Les Idées et les lettres au XIII^e siècle*, pp. 298–346 (especially pp. 322–23); Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, pp. 87, 92; and, on the problem of what is ‘natural’ for the individual as opposed to the ‘natural’ order of things, see Cadden, “‘Nothing Natural is Shameful’”, pp. 72–73, 76–77.

Penser de nature honorer,
 Servez la par bien laborer,
 Et se de l'autrui riens avez,
 Rendez le, se vous le savez [...]
 D'occision nus ne s'aprouche,
 Netes aiez et mains et bouche,
 Soiez loial, soiez piteus:
 Lors iroiz ou champ deliteus
 Par trace l'aignel et sivant (ll. 20641–44, 20649–53).

Take care to honour Nature, and work hard in her service, and, if you have anything belonging to someone else, give it back if you can [...] Everyone should avoid killing; keep your hands and mouth clean, be loyal and merciful: then you will go to the delightful fields, following the footsteps of the lamb.

The park is an imaginative and synthetic figure for a Christian/philosophical notion of sexual procreation, which it conflates with an idea of heaven: it has been read as serious philosophy.²⁷

But Jean exaggerates almost every element within this system till it no longer fits in. The requirement to have heterosexual sex, for instance, leads not only to an anathematization of homosexuality, but also to the questioning of religious celibacy:

S'il veult donques que virges vive
 Aucuns, pour ce que mieus le sive,
 Des autres por quoi nel vorra? [...]
 Donc samble il qu'il ne li chausist
 Se generacion fausist [...]
 Viegnent devin qui en devinent,
 Qui de ce deviner ne finent (ll. 19623–25, 19627–28, 19631–32).

So, if [God] wants some people to live as virgins, the better to follow him, why would he not want the same for others? [...] In that case it would seem that he did not care if generation ceased [...] Let theologians — who never stop theologizing — come to theologize about it.

Characteristically, Jean demurs about common theological assumptions in favour of celibacy, 'Je ne sai plus de la besoingne' ('I do not know any more about the business'; l. 19630). He also exaggerates all the material and practical processes associated with sexual reproduction. Death, its counterpart and apparent

²⁷ See Paré, *Les Idées et les lettres au XIII^e siècle*; Gunn, *The Mirror of Love*; Poirion, *Le Roman de la rose*. For the opposite view, see Fleming, *The Roman de la rose*.

catalyst, has become a rapacious force in its own right, appearing in the classical persons of the fate Atropos and the hell hound Cerberus:

Ceste de lui paistre ne cesse,
 Et pour ce que souefle pesse,
 Cist mastins li pent as mameles
 Qu'ele a tribles, non pas jumeles;
 Ses .iij. groinz en son saing li muce
 Et les groignoie et tire et suce,
 N'ainc ne fu ne ja n'iert sevrez (ll. 19819–25).

She [Atropos] feeds him continually, and, in order to feed comfortably, this hound hangs on her breasts, of which she has three rather than two; he buries his three snouts in her breasts, and he butts, tugs and sucks, and he has never been, nor will be, weaned.

Paradoxically imaged as violently animate and feeding, this grotesque version of Death seems now to be the driver of procreation: Cerberus's maw is always empty, 'Combien que de l'emplir se paine' ('However hard [Atropos] tries to fill it'; l. 19835).²⁸ Comic and grotesque versions of the sexual act also dominate Genius's sermon, with its repeated sexual imperatives and its graphic detailing of the parts required. What is more, although these instructions conform *in theory* to the logic of Christian procreation, in sharp contrast to Bernardus Silvestris's *Cosmographia* or Alan of Lille's *De planctu Naturae*, Genius does not mention anything 'produced'. All that we see is the sexual act and its tools.²⁹

Arez, pour Dieu, baron, arez [...]
 Secourciez vous bien par devant
 Ausi com pour cueillir le vant;
 Ou s'il vous plaist, tuit nu soiez,
 Mais trop froit ne trop chaut n'aiez.
 Levez aus .ij. mains toutes nues
 Les mancheriaus de vos charrues,
 Forment aus braz les soutenez
 Et du soc bouter vous penez

²⁸ Just as the park seems to be both an exemplary Nature and also heaven, so Atropos and Cerberus both seem to represent Death itself and also to exist locally and individually in hell (ll. 19843–68).

²⁹ Gaunt, 'Bel Accueil and the Improper Allegory of the *Romance of the Rose*', has shown that a strand of homoeroticism also throws the continuation's apparent commitment to heterosexuality into question.

Roidement en la droite voie,
Pour mieus afonder en la roie (ll. 19705, 19709–18).

Plough, barons, plough for God's sake [...] Tuck up your clothes well in front of you as though to take the air; or be quite naked if you like, but do not get too cold or too hot. Lift the handles of your ploughs with your two bare hands, support them firmly with your arms and exert yourself to thrust the ploughshare stiffly on the right path, to plough the furrow more deeply.

Nor are the euphemisms and deceptions of *fin' amors* far away, moreover, for Genius's descriptions of sex constantly mask it with elaborate figuration: just as Faus Samblant flaunted the liar's paradox, so here, it can be all too clearly seen that nothing is what it seems. Alongside the apparent primacy of the sexual act, then, is the thrill of verbal wit and innuendo. When Genius claims —

Et cil qui de toute sa force
De nature garder s'esforce
Et qui de bien amer se paine
Sanz nulle pensee vilaine,
Mais que loialment i travaille,
Floriz en paradis s'en aille. (ll. 19537–42)

And, as for the man who strives to preserve Nature with all his strength, who makes the effort to love well and keep himself from base thoughts, toiling at it loyally, may he go to paradise crowned with flowers.

— he might be referring to the good Christian life ending in heaven, but it sounds more like orgasm achieved. Repeatedly, the large synthesis of nature is problematized by verbal, material and bodily parts in irrepressible and constant motion — but always under the guise of narrative continuity and epistemological coherence.

Intriguingly, a formal parallel to this pervasive subversion of the epistemological frame can be found in the very structure of the speeches themselves. Poirion first noticed that the speeches of Jean's *Roman* tend to have a symmetrical structure, by which the speaker starts on a particular topic, works through a sequence of other topics till she or he reaches the centre of the speech, and then works back through the same topics in inverse order; Kay has further observed that these symmetrical patterns tend to frame a contradiction: 'the digression (or content of the frame) can also be read in each case as undermining the frame'.³⁰ In the speeches, in other words, a superficially coherent rhetoric

³⁰ See Poirion, *Le Roman de la rose*, pp. 124–33; Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, p. 64 (also pp. 60–65).

is discovered to mask a series of inner contradictions. Genius's sermon, for example, starts with the ill-fittingly fore-grounded injunctions to labour for Nature that we discussed above, arrives at the central philosophical and theological ecphrasis of the exemplary park (which supposedly justifies the injunctions), and then works its way back to the crude fact of labouring for Nature — all with perfect surface continuity. The huge 'confession' of Nature works in the same way, but in reverse, and in even more extreme terms. Book-ended by a vision of the exemplary world and the heavens, it contains within it these two discussions of virtue, divine prescience and the problem of free will, and, at its centre, a long description of the commotions and contingencies of the natural world, along with common perceptual deceptions, misleading appearances, distorting mirrors and dreams. Inside Nature's confession, then, is a double discussion of wayward human volition and, in the middle, a vision of the unruly and deceiving world;³¹ in a speech supposedly celebrating the systematic and orderly domain of nature, Jean brazenly gives centre-stage to the marginal phenomena — the contingent, ill-fitting and dissonant — that are at work within it. These contradictions go unacknowledged, however, illustrating once again that Jean's default position is simultaneously to undermine and evade the claims of systematic epistemology.³² By the time the poem reaches its outrageous ending, a bathetic, mechanistic and pornographic 'allegory' of sexual action, it seems that the epistemologies of *fin'amors* and of nature — among others — have been reduced to no more than their parts.³³

Later Middle English writers seem to have learned something of this technique from Jean de Meun, and, in the next pages, I will document this from

³¹ See Kay, *The Romance of the Rose*, pp. 96–101; on the unreliability of sensory perception in the *Roman*, also pp. 72–93.

³² Another predecessor of the Wife of Bath, Nature is a woman who flaunts all those scepticism-inducing features that misogyny would condemn: 'Fame sui, si ne me puis taire' ('I am a woman, and so I cannot be silent'; l. 19222); 'ja fame n'iert tant estable | Qu'el ne soit diverse et muable' ('no woman was ever so stable that she was not fickle and changeable'; ll. 16331–32); in line with the ostentatious misogyny of Jean's continuation, Nature links the feminine with nature, fortune, change and contingency. For a contrasting view, see Kay, 'Women's Body of Knowledge'.

³³ Heller-Roazen, *Fortune's Faces*, pp. 63–99, has discussed the appearance of Fortune in Jean's *Roman* at ll. 5838–6896 in terms that relate to my concerns. He claims that Jean exaggerates her endlessly spinning wheel, her disorder, her capacity both 'to be and not to be' and her dependence on accidental occurrence, noting that she is both the personified agent of contingency and subject to it.

the work of Chaucer and Lydgate, though it could have been equally well illustrated by Gower or Henryson.³⁴

It is widely acknowledged that Chaucer's compositional method is narrative, ironic, and inexplicit. But, like Jean, Chaucer also exploits the philosophically relativizing gesture of placing philosophical positions in the mouths of his protagonists; and he is certainly interested in the way a system may be placed under pressure by its parts. In Chaucer, however, these moves take a distinctive form, due to his interest in the complexities of human desire, pleasure and suffering. Writing of the *Canterbury Tales*, Anne Middleton says that, when Chaucer 'introduces obstacles to the simple acceptance of [...] "sentence"', these often take the form of 'counter-currents and eddies of [...] emotional resistance'; Middleton describes these narrative moments as 'focal points of strong advocacy' — the dreadful pathos of the child who will be killed to 'save' her from rape in the Physician's Tale, the unacceptable cruelty that 'patient' Griselde is lauded for putting up with in the Clerk's Tale, or, as we saw above, the ebullient pleasures of the Wife of Bath.³⁵ To put Middleton's observation in my terms, these *Canterbury Tales*, ostensibly geared to one interpretation, are repeatedly thrown into question from within by the contrary implications of their complex and affectively freighted narratives. The disturbing power of this technique depends on its inexplicitness and its inculcation of a pervasive feeling of shock or discomfort; its sceptical implications, however, derive from the refusal to rearticulate this shock and discomfort in terms of any formally recognizable knowledge system.³⁶

Although the technique could be further explored in the *Canterbury Tales*, here I will focus on Chaucer's earlier writings, the *Parliament of Fowls*, the Knight's Tale and *Troilus and Criseyde*, where we find him using it for more overtly philosophical purposes.³⁷ It is here, after all, that Chaucer is dealing directly with questions about nature and fortune.

³⁴ In the *Confessio amantis* Gower inserts a narrative of *fin'amors* into a developmental and ethical confessional framework, but then allows this recursive and hopeless love narrative to query the confessional frame from within; in the *Testament of Cresseid* Henryson revisits the Chaucerian question of 'judging' Cresseid but tells the tale in such an emotionally charged way as to throw the whole idea in question.

³⁵ Middleton, 'The Physician's Tale and Love's Martyrs' (citations pp. 26, 24).

³⁶ For earlier claims about Chaucer's scepticism, see Delany, *Chaucer's House of Fame*; Utz, 'Philosophy', pp. 168–71; also Miller, *Philosophical Chaucer*.

³⁷ On the likelihood of the Knight's Tale pre-dating the *Canterbury Tales*, see Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson and others, p. 826.

The *Parliament of Fowls* is an altogether more courtly engagement with Nature than that of Jean de Meun. In the last part of the poem, having passed through the languorously inactive temple of Venus,³⁸ Chaucer's narrator finds the 'noble goddesse Nature' presiding over the world of living birds; it is 'Seynt Valentynes day, | Whan every foul cometh there to chese his make [mate]' (*Parliament of Fowls*, ll. 309–10). Chaucer's version of nature is one whose orderliness involves the naturalized hierarchy of class. The birds are all arranged according to their social position, with the noble 'foules of ravyne [birds of prey] [...] hiest set' (ll. 323–34) and the lower, worm- and seed-eating birds placed in descending order of precedence; on her hand, Nature has the very best of all her works, 'A formel [female] egle, of shap the gentilleste | That evere she among hire werkes fond' (ll. 373–74); three noble *tersels* (male eagles) vie for the *formel* like courtly lovers.

However, the poem contains a very Chaucerian joke, at the expense of both *fin' amors* and nature. Not only are the *tersels* all in love with the same bird, but they all sound identical; given that they all profess unwavering love, at least two of them are bound to be disappointed, and, anyway, it is not clear what the criteria for choosing between them are. When the debate is over, the *formel*, in the manner of a modest courtly 'lady', asks for respite before she chooses — 'I wol nat serve Venus ne Cupide, | Forsothe as yit, by no manere weye' (ll. 652–53). If the joke is at the expense of the literature of *fin' amors*, with its endless exquisite deferrals, it is also at the expense of Nature, whose 'best' creations remain unproductive and sterile, either by loving in such a way that they are almost certain to be frustrated, or by refusing to love at all. At the heart of this supposedly self-perpetuating order of things, with its accompanying valorisation of class structure and courtly modes of conduct, we find an unacknowledged contradiction: those of Nature's creatures who are actually doing her work and reproducing one way or another ("Ye queke," seyde the goos, "ful wel and fayre! | There been mo sterres, God wot, than a payre!"; ll. 594–5) are the lower-class ones; the more exquisite and aristocratic Nature's creatures are, the less they do her work or use her 'parts'. Courtly nature and its hierarchies seem to have imploded. Chaucer replaces the framing vision of the temple of Venus with the vision of courtly nature, but finally undermines both; not only does he not acknowledge that he has done this, but he also seems to feel no need to replace these framing visions with any other.

³⁸ See Zeeman, 'The Idol of the Text', pp. 58–60.

Sexuality is still at issue in the Knight's Tale and *Troilus and Criseyde*, though now it is situated in relation to the figure of fortune — a fortune that probably owes as much to the radical contingency of the fortune of Alan of Lille and Jean de Meun as it does to that of Boethius.³⁹ Each of these Chaucerian texts invokes a familiar philosophical frame to deal with changeability and then — in my view — repudiates it. In the Knight's Tale this comes into focus at Theseus's concluding speech, where he counsels a combination of stoic resignation and Boethian trust in a benign 'Firste Moevere', insisting that the mutabilities of nature are all part of a 'faire cheyne of love' (Knight's Tale, I. 2987–3093). Many readers have found this summing up of a narrative of hapless love, recursive violence and divine indifference problematic.⁴⁰ Once again, we see that to put philosophy in the mouth of a protagonist (whether this is an allegorical personification or a narrative character) raises questions about its status and applicability; Theseus's 'philosophy' is after all a means of characterizing him and his desires, and Boethianism suits his social and political agenda.⁴¹ But the real problem with Theseus's valiant but jaded speech is that its commonplaces sort poorly with the tale that precedes it, a tale larded with 'focal points of strong advocacy': 'What is this world? What asketh men to have? | Now with his love, now in his colde grave | Allone, withouten any compaignye' (Knight's Tale, I. 2777–9). Lines such as these, spoken by the unfortunate Arcite, undermine Theseus's Boethian philosophy, relativistically relegating it to the role of character illustration, but, once again, without putting anything in its place.

This sceptical manoeuvre appears in its most sophisticated form in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Once read as exemplary Boethianism,⁴² the poem is now usually seen as a riposte to it, recently described by Jessica Rosenfeld as an 'inquiry into the nature of human happiness and sensible pleasures', raising questions of enjoyment and possession and what it might mean for felicity to 'suffice'.⁴³ The

³⁹ On fortune here, see Mann, 'Chance and Destiny in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Knight's Tale*'; also notes 9 and 33 above.

⁴⁰ See Donaldson, 'The Ending of *Troilus*', p. 89; Salter, *Fourteenth-Century English Poetry*, pp. 141–81; Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, pp. 165–230.

⁴¹ Utz, 'Philosophy', pp. 161–62, notes that here and in *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer uses ventriloquized philosophy as a means of characterization; but Utz underplays the philosophical work that this also performs.

⁴² Most famously by Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 472–502.

⁴³ Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry*, pp. 151, 8 (citing *Troilus*, III. 1691–92); see pp. 14–44, 135–59. On fortune in *Troilus*, see Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature*, pp. 27–46.

poem's proposed Boethian frame is hinted at throughout the narrative, in allusions to predestination, fate, chance and fortune; and it is explicitly laid out in the anticlimactic closing sections, where, by a series of valedictory codas, both the narrator and Troilus make their farewells to the world of the poem. Indeed, the narrator will even repudiate Troilus, along with the Greek *payens*, their gods, 'the forme of olde clerkis speche | In poetrie', and, in an access of explicitly Christianized Boethianism, advises his readers to turn to 'thilke God that after his ymage | Yow made'.⁴⁴ Troilus participates in this Boethian condemnation of the contingent world and the passions it excites when, having died insignificantly at the hands of Achilles, he goes up to the pagan other-world of the 'eighthe spere', and looks back:

[...] and fully gan despise
This wrecched world, and held al vanite
To respect of the pleyn felicite
That is in hevene above; and at the laste,
Ther he was slayn his lokyng down he caste,
And in hymself he lough right at the wo
Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste,
And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so
The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste [...] (V. 1816–24).

With their acknowledgement of 'the pleyn felicite | That is in hevene above', these lines appear to offer Troilus the philosophical 'consolation' of detachment from the changeabilities of the world, and the woman whose capacity both for pleasure and for change encouraged critics of a Boethianizing generation to think of the figure of fortune.⁴⁵

And yet, despite its ostensible continuity with what has gone before, this ending is a notoriously inadequate response to it:⁴⁶ this effect is once again substantially the result of Chaucer's passionate, comic and critical narration of the love affair itself in the body of the poem — and his celebration of the many pleasures that both lovers seem to derive from it. Indeed, in Book III even Boethius is co-opted into the language of love, as *Consolation* II, metrum 8, provides the material for Troilus's climactic 'song' — another example of phi-

⁴⁴ *Troilus and Criseyde*, V. 1828–69; see Mann, 'Chance and Destiny in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Knight's Tale*'; Donaldson, 'The Ending of *Troilus*'.

⁴⁵ See Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 472, 498.

⁴⁶ Donaldson, 'The Ending of *Troilus*'; Salter, '*Troilus and Criseyde*: Poet and Narrator'.

losophy used, not as an intellectual imprimatur, but as a mode of characterization and a description of Troilus's ecstatic state of mind:

Love, that of erthe and se hath governaunce,
 Love, that his hestes hath in hevene hye,
 Love, that with an holsom alliaunce
 Halt peoples joyned [...] (III. 1744–47).⁴⁷

Chaucer throws his Boethian frame into question, then, by the oblique means of situational complexity and affective pressure effected through narrative technique. The incapacity of the poem's ending to acknowledge Chaucer's engaged description of the dangerous pleasures of erotic love and companionship (not to mention the difficult phenomena of fortune and history) forces the reader to look back at earlier sections and reassess her own responses to them. Chaucer's narrative thus throws into question the Boethian claim that the only pleasures that matter are the ones that last (and lie elsewhere), its implicit question turning out to be: does the fact that earthly pleasures — *Fortune's pleasures* — do not last mean that we should value them less? If the implied answer is 'no', then Chaucer never states it, though the implication must be, as Rosenfeld puts it, that 'an ethics of felicity needs the two lovers as much as it needs Boethius and Aristotle'.⁴⁸

I return to Troilus in the eighth sphere. In Chaucer's passionate poetic, Troilus's lack of empathy and his rigidly Boethian repudiation of the world condemn him and the 'philosophical' position he occupies. Of this passage Mary Carruthers has said: 'Troilus' disembodied laughter is finally too cold, too dispassionate, too pagan and Stoic to be wholly true'.⁴⁹ When Troilus 'lough right at the wo | Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste', Chaucer offers a shallow version of the Boethian epistemology that denies any value to a felt engagement with the contingent world; Chaucer's decision to locate the scene in the middle of the poem's cumulating negative codas suggests that he regards it as altogether problematic. Once again, it is Chaucer's decision to engage with sys-

⁴⁷ The technique is all-pervasive; compare Criseyde lamenting about fortune as a means of holding Pandarus and Troilus at bay (III. 813–33); or Troilus replicating Boethian arguments against free will without their Boethian 'solution' as an expression of despair and the incapacity to act (IV. 956–1084).

⁴⁸ Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry*, p. 137.

⁴⁹ Carruthers connects the valuation of tears to ascetic monasticism, observing that in this context 'it is laughter that is both cold and dry': Carruthers, 'On Affliction and Reading, Weeping and Argument', pp. 13–14.

tematic philosophy not in analytical but in narrative terms that has the effect of disengaging from its claims.

Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, expanded from the already expanded translation of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium* by Laurent de Premierfait, not only has an ostensibly Boethian providential framework, but also presents itself as an advisory text for princes, teaching them how to avoid the worst effects of Fortune.⁵⁰ We have already seen, however, that in the later Middle Ages fortune seems to become even more problematic than it was for Boethius: in Boccaccio's strongly moral *De casibus*, where fortune is treated 'as coextensive with God's will', as Paul Strohm notes, there remains a latent tension — fortune and her uncertainty principle cannot be completely 'assimilated' to the divine will.⁵¹ This may also be true of Chaucer's own 'de casibus' text, the Monk's Tale, which also inverts the Boethian paradigm, its multiple tales linked by their obsessive focus on the disastrous working of fortune, coupled with a lack of reference to the Boethian structures that supposedly give fortune meaning.⁵² Maura Nolan and Nigel Mortimer have claimed that Lydgate's *Fall*, and Book I in particular, have an even more contradictory attitude to fortune, one that 'hinges on the philosophical problem of contingency, the most serious threat to a moralizing causality that insists that falls result from sin'. Nolan argues that throughout the book Lydgate tempers the project of princely advice with 'an elegiac, Ovidian and feminine discourse of love betrayed and lost', which she, citing Lydgate himself, calls 'chantepleure, | Gynnyng with ioie, and eendyng in wrechidnesse'. The book has 'a system of doubling, whereby the dominant discourse or logic is paired with its opposite and maintained in a state of constant and irresolvable tension'.⁵³ With its emotively loaded narrative and repeated insertions of lyric lament, Book I emphasizes the unavoidable and random blows of fortune in a way that entirely contradicts not only the 'advice to princes' genre but also the poem's larger Christian and Boethian conceptual frame.

For a great part of the book, Lydgate does not emphasize human powers of action, but laments the horrors and misfortunes of life. Nolan documents

⁵⁰ Lydgate, *Fall of Princes*, ed. by Bergen.

⁵¹ Strohm, *Politique*, pp. 92–93; also Summit, "Stable in study", p. 221.

⁵² On the uncertain nature of the influence of this text on Lydgate, however, see Mortimer, *John Lydgate's 'Fall of Princes'*, p. 170.

⁵³ Nolan, "Now wo, now gladnesse", pp. 534, 532, 553; see also p. 546; referring to the *Fall of Princes*, I. 2159–60; Mortimer, *John Lydgate's 'Fall of Princes'*, pp. 48, 60, 185, 195–208; also Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature*, pp. 87–109; and, on complaint in the *Fall*, Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, pp. 239, 248, 250.

this in detail, so a few examples will suffice. When Iocasta appears to the narrator, ‘Bocchas’, at the beginning of the long sequence devoted to herself and Edippus, for instance, it is ‘Lich a woman that wolde in teres reyne, | For that Fortune gan at hir so disdeyne’; she declares ‘pleynli how that she | Off all princessis which ever stood in staat, | She was hirselff the moste infortunat’ (I. 3163–64, 3169–71). By the time she has committed suicide, ‘weri [...] off hir woful liff, | Seying off Fortune the grete frowardnesse’, the Lydgatian narrator is left lamenting,

Bet is to deie than lyve in wrechidnesse,
 Bet is to deie than ever endure peyne,
 Bet is an eende than dedli hevynesse,
 Bet is to deie than ever in wo compleyne (I. 3774–75, 3795–98).

Of course, Book I does contain attempts to recuperate the situation with moral commentary and instruction (even Edippus receives a bit of moral critique), but its predominant emphasis is on the devastating blows of fortune. Atreas is bad (he has killed his wife’s children and fed them to her lover, Thyestes), but also ‘unfortunate’ in that Thyestes has both had sex with his wife and one of the daughters of this union; Atreus asks Bochas, ‘off herte, I praye the, | Which off these stories is now most terrible? — | Off Edippus, Iocasta, or off me?’ (I. 4173–75). Althaea, torn between love of her son and the brothers whom her son has killed, finally kills the son as well — ‘And I off haste, allas, whi dede I so! | Tavenge ther deth have slayn my sone also’; before she commits suicide, she laments, ‘I may weel playne on such departison, | Nat for a day, but, o allas, for evere!’ (I. 5025–26, 5020–21). The tale of Canacee may have involved incestuous love, but Lydgate’s retelling is dominated by the language of pity: ‘And most hir sorwe was for hir childe sake, | Upon whos face in hir barm [lap] slepyng | Ful many a teer she wepte in compleynyng’ (I. 7026–28). In such affective and melodramatic passages as these, it seems hard to align Lydgate’s version of fortune with any recognizable philosophical system, whether Boethian or even just morally instructive.

Interestingly, this seems to have caused concern. In the prologue to Book II of the *Fall*, Lydgate narrates how he was interrupted by his patron, Duke Humphrey, the collector of Italian humanist books, whose large library was, Jennifer Summit suggests, part of a political project to present himself as indispensable to the young king and the maintenance of his power.⁵⁴ According to the poet, the Duke ‘cam forbi’ and:

⁵⁴ See Summit, “‘Stable in study’”, p. 211.

Gaff me charge in his prudent auys, *opinion, wisdom*
 That I sholde in eueri tragedie,
 Afftir the processe made mencioun,
 At the eende sette a remedie,
 With a lenvoie conveied be resoun,
 And afftir that, with humble affeccoun,
 To noble pryncis lowli it directe,
 Bi others fallyng thei might them silff correcte (II. 145, 147–53).

Duke Humphrey insists on Lydgate's moral and advisory agenda. Is this Lydgate's version of the Knight's interruption of the Monk's Tale? If Chaucer's Knight was disturbed or offended by the Monk's endless tales of aristocratic disaster,⁵⁵ Lydgate presents Duke Humphrey as masking any discomfort he might feel about aristocratic 'fall' in a general pedagogic concern, his request 'forc[ing] Lydgate to turn each story into the basis of moral lessons for princes'.⁵⁶ From this point on, Lydgate is considerably more systematic in his ethical readings.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, in Book I, Lydgate is surely experimenting with his own, unruly version of the potentially sceptical, anti-systematizing move — a move with which he would have been familiar from the writings of Jean de Meun and Chaucer.

In this essay I have stressed the characteristic obliquity of medieval literary approaches to recognizably theological or philosophical problems. The narrative, imaginative and figural modes of the medieval literary text had long, after all, enabled it to throw into question ideas and teachings purveyed by institutions such as the church or the schools, precisely because it was not obliged to engage with these authorities in their preferred analytic, logical or preceptive terms.⁵⁸ What I have argued in this essay is that in some cases a literary refusal of the language of analysis, logic or precept can become a larger, anti-systematizing, even anti-metaphysical, gesture, part of whose critical impact derives from its obliquity and its evasiveness. Could we go so far as to say that such an extreme sceptical gesture could, in the later Middle Ages, *only be made* from within literary discourse?

⁵⁵ See Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, p. 226.

⁵⁶ Summit, "Stable in study", p. 221; also Mortimer, *John Lydgate's 'Fall of Princes'*, p. 186. On the *Fall of Princes* as an 'advice to princes' text, see Pearsall, *John Lydgate*, pp. 223–54; Strohm, *Politique*, pp. 93–99.

⁵⁷ But see Mitchell on Book VI, in Mitchell, *Ethics and Eventfulness in Middle English Literature*, pp. 87–109.

⁵⁸ Zeeman, 'The Schools Give a License to Poets'; Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*.

Whether or not this is true, it is my assumption that Jean de Meun and Chaucer were in some kind of self-conscious dialogue with their scholastic contemporaries. This is not just because Jean de Meun and Chaucer were both intellectually ambitious and informed about the scholastic currents of their day;⁵⁹ it is also because their works address problems that would have been recognized in medieval theological and philosophical contexts: issues of contingency, embodiment, reproduction, sexuality, pleasure and suffering. The fact that they tackle those issues in such a way as to throw into question some of the epistemological methods of the schools (and the fact that occasionally their techniques bear some likeness to those by which the scholastics themselves throw these epistemological methods into question) is precisely the point. Lydgate, not to mention Gower and Henryson, may make fewer overt references to scholastic philosophy than Jean de Meun and Chaucer. However, by the time Lydgate is writing, the works of his hugely influential literary predecessors had already produced their own recognizable tradition of 'literary' and sceptical philosophizing, and it is in this tradition that I would situate him. While it may be that the non-analytic modes of this poetical sceptical tradition have made it hard for modern historians of medieval philosophy to recognize it as a central component in the medieval philosophical inheritance, I suggest that its import may not have been lost on medieval readers.

⁵⁹ For Jean de Meun, see above, pp. 219–25; for Chaucer, see Hester Goodenough Gelber here, 'Laughter and Deception: Holcot and Chaucer Stay Cheerful', pp. 285–304.

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VERNACULAR OPINIONS

Mishtooni Bose

‘**H**istorical knowledge, then, has for its proper object thought: not things thought about, but the act of thinking itself’.¹ To extend R. G. Collingwood’s conclusion into territory beyond that of *The Idea of History*, one might argue that if ‘[a]ll history is the history of thought’, then literary history is concerned, at least in part, with representations of ‘the act of thinking’.² In line with this possibility, Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay have recently suggested that medieval poetry ‘is an exceptional moment in the history of thought as well as of literature’.³ In exploring the implications of this claim, they concentrate on French verse, rather than on every kind of writing that could be defined as *poetrie*, a term variously freighted during this period by associations with allegory, classical lore, and edification.⁴ In this essay, however, I explore some of the ‘acts of thinking’ invited by prose works in English and French: Christine de Pizan’s *Livre de L’Advision Cristine* (1405) and Reginald Pecock’s mid-fifteenth-century *Folewer to the Donet* and *Book of Faith*. In particular, I explore the seminal roles that both authors assigned to the category of opinion, which they regarded as synonymous with uncertain knowledge.

¹ Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, ed. by Van der Dussen, p. 305.

² Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, ed. by Van der Dussen, p. 317.

³ Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, p. 21.

⁴ On the possible relationships between verse, poetry and *poetrie*, see Armstrong and Kay, *Knowing Poetry*, pp. 9–13.

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As the personification Opinion declares to Christine in *L'Advision*: 'I am never certain; for if certainty exists, I will not exist'.⁵ For Pecock, *uncerteynte* was the natural state of human knowledge *per speculum et in aenigmate* (in St Paul's words — or 'through a glass in a dark manner', as the Douay-Reims translation has it).⁶ And it was on this basis that he decided that the term 'opinial', and its variant 'opynyonal', could legitimately be used to denote a mode of knowing appropriate to all faith 'necessarie in this lijf':⁷

[...] ther ben ii maners of feith. Oon is opinial feith, and this is he which we and alle Cristen han, bi the comoun lawe of God, whilis we liven in this lijf; as Poul therto accordith in an other place, I Cor. Xiii^c, seiying thus: *Now we seen in a myrroure in uncerteynte; thane, forsothe*, that is to seie in hevene, *we schal se face to face*. Another feith is sciencial feith, and thouþ this feith may be had bi specialte (*exceptionally*) in this lijf, þitt it is not comounli had in this lijf, but it is had in the blisse of hevene.⁸

Both of these vernacular experiments, therefore, were fuelled by bold realignments of opinion in relation to other modes of knowing. Uncertainty, as explored by Christine and voiced by Opinion, is not only a necessary prerequisite to the more stable modes of knowing voiced by Philosophy and Theology, but a seminal and inventive mode in its own right; and, I would suggest, one of paramount importance to a writer for whom the intermediate states of the dream, the *chemin*, the dialogue and the disputation, were a recurrent preoccupation. Likewise, Pecock's interference in the long-established taxonomy of scholastic theology can be read in several ways. His use of the term 'sciencial' to denote faith enjoyed 'in the blisse of hevene' at best compresses, and at worst discards, layers of meaning associated with the conceptually rich term *scientia*. His assignment of all faith 'comounli had in this lijf' to the realm of the 'opinial' could be interpreted as a confident expression of vernacular creativity; equally, it could be viewed as the triumph of expediency over nuance. It is more than possible that, in their different ways, both of these experiments with opinion reflect the multiple pressures of the historical moments at which they occurred. For notwithstanding the considerable and obvious differences between the

⁵ 'Je ne suis nulle fois certaine, car se certaineté y avoit, ce ne seroi je mie': Christine de Pizan, *Le Livre de l'advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 57; translated in *The Vision of Christine de Pizan*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 57.

⁶ I Corinthians 13. 12.

⁷ Pecock, *Book of Faith*, ed. by Morison, p. 162. The precise dating of Pecock's works is uncertain.

⁸ Pecock, *Book of Faith*, ed. by Morison, p. 161.

kinds of writing produced by these two authors, both may be regarded as distinct but comparable expressions of a broader historical phenomenon: the spread of reformist and experimental thinking in late medieval Europe, a development catalysed by traumas such as the Great Schism, the Hundred Years' War, and by the historical plate tectonics generated in turn by these bigger traumas: in Christine's case, political struggles and crises in France, and, in Pecock's, the aftermath of the Wycliffite controversies, which Kantik Ghosh considers elsewhere in this volume.⁹

Rudolf Schüssler has argued that the Schism inevitably engendered 'new ways of dealing with epistemic and moral uncertainty'.¹⁰ This development coincided with what Daniel Hobbins has identified as the emergence of the late medieval 'public intellectual'.¹¹ I view Christine and Pecock as provocatively contrasting examples of this phenomenon in that both, for very different reasons, explicitly sought audiences beyond the confines of the medieval schools. For all their obvious differences, they are comparable as self-consciously *extramural* writers travelling in complementary intellectual directions: for if Pecock's vernacularity signified a Clerk's desire to address a lay audience, Christine's self-conception in *L'Advision* was that of a 'fille d'escolle', a 'daughter of the schools', as the personification of Opinion herself would identify her.¹² Both derived authorial capital from adopting an amphibious writing position between lay and clerical worlds. Such stances enabled them to survey institutionalized intellectual cultures from a real, imagined, or confected distance. This perspective is most dramatically achieved by Christine when her flight of the mind in *L'Advision* leads to her discovery of Opinion generating an array of scholarly opinions among 'scholars of the various learned faculties disputing together'.¹³ This is an outsider's *entrée* into a privileged sphere. From within that sphere, however, Pecock offered a jaundiced vignette, notably unleavened by the stylistic resourcefulness of *L'Advision*, of what he perceived as a crisis

⁹ I discuss this phenomenon further in Bose, 'Intellectual Life in Fifteenth-Century England', pp. 333–34; Kantik Ghosh, 'Logic, Scepticism and "Heresy" in Early Fifteenth-Century Europe: Oxford, Vienna, Constance', below, pp. 261–83.

¹⁰ Schüssler, 'Jean Gerson, Moral Certainty', p. 461.

¹¹ Hobbins, 'The Schoolman as Public Intellectual'.

¹² Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 54; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 55.

¹³ 'les escoliers de diverses facultez de sciences disputans ensemble': Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 51; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 53.

in late medieval English intellectuality whereby theology and philosophy had parted company:

And þit not wiþstondyng al þis, y haue wiste (*known*) wiþin þese vj þeeris passed (*six years past*) þat it haþ be seid of hem whiche helden hem (*considered themselves to be*) clerkis: 'fy in (*away with*) resoun, fy in argumentis'. And summe opire wolden laupe(*would laugh*) and calle 'sophym', (*sophism!*) whanne it was alleggid þat a trouþ was prouyd (*proved*) bi sillogisme, whiche is þe strengist argument forto proue that may be. Lo, how unkunnynghli (*ignorantly*) þei wenten to werk whanne þei weneden (*believed*) forto haue seid wel and wisely!¹⁴

The revisionist mentalities to which both writers gave expression are incidentally cemented through their shared conception, and valorisation, of Philosophy as a daughter of God, a personification through whom both writers voiced impassioned critiques of intellectual and cultural injustices. In *L'Advision*, Opinion acknowledges that: 'And notwithstanding that Philosophy with her daughters existed before me and that she should be the daughter of God, I was also created as soon as human understanding was'.¹⁵ When constructing a pathway for his reader into an earlier work of his, *The Reule of Christen Religioun*, Pecock turns to the genre of inventive vision that Christine uses so memorably in the *Live de la Cité des Dames*; in the *Reule* he produces an imagined encounter with the aggrieved 'treupis of philosophie' that reads like a precise and audaciously gender-reversed rewriting of Christine's famous encounter with Reason and her sisters in the opening of *Cité*.¹⁶ Exiled from the realm of English theology, the truths of philosophy complain to Pecock that 'we douþtris (*daughters*) of god lacken oure religiose and goostlie (*spiritual*) progenye'.¹⁷ Like Christine denouncing the lack of defenders of women in the *Cité*, Pecock denounces what he sees as a *trahison des clercs* resulting in a deleterious breach between philosophy and orthodox theology, a strand of complaint that also surfaces, as we will see, in the *Folewer*. And notably for our present purposes, the chief mistakes that he identifies among his fellow clerics are their '*many untrewē opynyouns* feyned and forged bi enviosity without ground of sufficient resoun

¹⁴ Pecock, *The Folewer to the Donet*, ed. by Hitchcock, p. 10.

¹⁵ 'Et non obstant que Philosophie avec ses filles fust avant que moy et que fille de Dieu soit, si fus je faicte aussi tost que créé fu entendement humain': Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 55; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 56.

¹⁶ Bose, 'The Annunciation to Pecock'. On the 'inventive vision' and its roots in the opening of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, see Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, pp. 173–76.

¹⁷ Pecock, *The Reule of Crysten Religioun*, ed. by Greet, p. 33.

or holy scripture'. This is a characterization of clerical culture that once more fortuitously replays Christine's image of the plethora of opinions generated by disputing scholars, but in a darker, narrower, and more embittered vein; the dignity that Pecock intended to confer on 'opynyonal feiþ' was, in his view, very far removed from his opponents' *opynyouns*.¹⁸

It could be argued that the artfulness with which these prose works handle their intellectual freight is considerably diminished by comparison with, for example, the 'lightness of touch' that Helen Swift, in the present volume, finds in Chartier or Froissart.¹⁹ Christine and Pecock were, after all, concerned with the correction of various kinds of intellectual and moral error, and with the necessity of distinguishing absolutely between skilful and unskilful modes of knowing. But I would maintain, nevertheless, that to a certain extent both authors share an important characteristic with those discussed by Swift: a fertile appreciation of the inventive capacity of uncertainty, and of its 'benefits [...] as a potent state of [...] creativity'.²⁰ Notwithstanding the essentially and inevitably transient epistemological status of Opinion among the modes of knowing explored by Christine in *L'Advision*, the personification remains, as others have recognized, a compellingly polysemous figure.²¹ In particular, I will emphasize here her importance as a catalyst for inquiry which, in my view, gives her an enduring charisma that may, in the readerly imagination at least, withstand her predictable and inevitable replacement by Philosophy/Theology in Book III. It is at least possible that Christine's treatment of Opinion offers her reader an experiential education that remains of value, notwithstanding the subsequent epistemological modulations of *L'Advision*. But it is also interesting to note that, as will be seen below, Pecock's refashioning of opinion as a theological term took things in a radical direction, quite beyond the remit of Christine's intellectual world. His translation of theological discourse into English was a fundamentally reformist act because it allowed him to appraise and revise the content and method of scholastic theology in the act of vernacularizing it, to elide the voices of his *auctoritates*, and to privilege certain keywords. The 'opynyonal feiþ' that he proffered to his lay readers was an audacious and problematic result of this

¹⁸ Pecock, *The Reule of Crysten Religioun*, ed. by Greet, p. 33 (my emphasis).

¹⁹ Helen Swift, 'The Merits of Not Knowing: The Paradox of *espoir certain* in Late-Medieval French Narrative Poetry', above, pp. 185–212.

²⁰ Swift, 'The Merits of Not Knowing', above, pp. 185–212.

²¹ See for example the suggestive discussion of *L'Advision* and Opinion in Fenster, 'Ways of Knowing in the *Songe veritable*', pp. 210–14. I consider Fenster's remarks further below.

process. Ultimately, if we consider these very different writers in the context of Schüssler's argument concerning the intellectual and epistemological consequences of the Great Schism, it is possible to argue that their diverse forms of intellectual creativity were galvanized by the necessary concern with uncertainty that it unleashed. For all their concern with the correction of error, both profited to some extent from the discursive opportunities afforded by uncertainty. Opinion gives us, in each case, a portal through which to view the different ways in which they represented, and sought to instigate, reformations of the mind; and it is a precise means by which to assess the very different implications and complex consequences of their vernacular experiments.

I

For Christine, as for Geoffrey Chaucer, the 'thing with feathers' was not hope but an altogether more equivocal and polysemous entity. As Thelma Fenster has noted, there is a profound connection between Chaucer's Fame in *The House of Fame* and Christine's Opinion in *L'Advision*.²² Shimmering like holograms, Fame and Opinion are inventive and charismatic precisely because they are psychologically arousing and unstable, presiding over realms of pluralized entities, the endless and the unresolved: in Fenster's words, they 'share the qualities of shapelessness, porousness and multiplicity, lack of containment and uncontrollability, characterized in part by the metaphor of flight'.²³ The metaphor of flight is a means whereby further layers of productive uncertainty are worked into Christine's text, as a transferring of avian qualities takes place between the spirit of the author-surrogate and the figure of Opinion. At the beginning of Book I, the narrator's spirit leaves her body:

it seemed that my body was flying in mid-air; and then it seemed to me that by the force of many winds, my spirit was being carried into a shadowy country in which it came to rest in a valley, floating on many streams.²⁴

²² Fenster, 'Ways of Knowing in the *Songe veritable*', pp. 211–12.

²³ Fenster, 'Ways of Knowing in the *Songe veritable*', p. 212. On similar connections between Opinion and Fortune, see Griffin, 'Transforming Fortune: Reading and Chance in Christine de Pizan', pp. 69–70.

²⁴ '[...] m'a samblé que mon corps en l'air volast; m'estoit adont avis que par le soufflement de divers vens mon esperit translatez estoit en une contree tenebreuse en laquelle terminoit un val flotant sur diverses eaus'. Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 12; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 18.

Unlike the dreamer in Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls*, who searches futilely in books for a 'certeyne thing' and remains stubbornly pedestrian even when transported to an avian realm, Christine's feminine-avian spirit achieves a privileged perspective. And even when compared with the avian privileges accorded to Chaucer's narrator on his flight from space to space in *The House of Fame*, Christine benefits throughout *L'Advision* from her status as an 'es-trangier voiageur', 'foreign traveller', to whom 'the treasures of the princes are often shown and opened with pleasure'.²⁵ At the beginning of Book II, however, she too is pedestrian, and it is Opinion, an enigma in the form of a bodiless shadow, that is airborne among the scholars. The transference of avian qualities between human spirit and shadow is paradigmatic of a text in which an explicit insistence on the necessity of discernment, discrimination, and revision is sometimes accompanied by, and even articulated through, an intriguing blurring of boundaries between entities.

Many aspects of Douglas Kelly's recent exploration of Opinion and opinions in Christine's writings are congenial to my argument here, notably his observation of the way in which Christine foregrounds 'the thought processes by which humans seek certainty'.²⁶ Most pertinently, Kelly is interested in the way in which Christine modelled the correction of her own errors and interpretations of experience through her encounters with Opinion and Philosophy/Theology. As a means of provoking reflexivity in both Christine and her reader, Opinion challenges Christine by instigating in her a reconsideration of views expressed in earlier works, such as the *Livre de la Mutation de Fortune* (1403), regarding the sole agency of Fortune in determining the tragic events in her life. The path towards such reconsideration had also been laid in the *Chemin de longue estude* (1403), where it took the form of a critical rereading of Boethius, culminating in the realization that the possession of virtues pre-empts the suffering that might be brought on by the uncertain possession of worldly goods.²⁷ In *L'Advision*, this process of reconsideration is taken further, as Opinion induces Christine to revise some of her previous conclusions, and to recognize that Fortune does not exercise sole agency in disposing the affairs of mankind:

²⁵ 'liement souventesfois sont monstrez et ouvers les tresors des princes': Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 91; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 88.

²⁶ Kelly, *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion*, p. 3.

²⁷ Kelly, *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion*, pp. 19–20, 74.

I wish you, then, to retract some of your statements in your book entitled *Mutation of Fortune* [...] For [...] you were quite mistaken [...] when you authorized the power of Dame Fortune so much that you said there that she was the sole directress of the deeds prevalent among men, and you forgot my sovereign power over all mutual influences in common deeds, which excels all others.²⁸

And when Christine, like a good pupil, rehearses her correct understanding of the relationship between a work and its first principle, Opinion is able to show that she has changed Christine's mind by engaging its own faculties: 'You have answered well. Now I have conquered you by your own judgement!'.²⁹

Kelly's concern with the importance of the intellectual virtues — consideration, discretion, retention and memory — in Christine's thinking is consonant with my interest in the way in which *L'Advision* cultivates these qualities through readerly process.³⁰ He also shows how nuanced and ample Christine's understanding of opinion was, with feeling (*sentement*) and experience having their roles to play in the critical evaluation of opinion, and he is acutely attentive to Christine's taxonomy of intellectual discrimination, in which terms such as *esplucher* (winnowing, sifting) are prominent.³¹ Above all, I agree with his contention that 'the interest and beauty of *L'Advision* lie in its interpretative potential'.³² But in my view that potential is not only contained in the work's tenor, its deployments of rhetoric and its many inducements to reflective reading, in a mode 'open to changing opinions by rereading in new contexts'.³³ Rather, it also appears in complementary aspects of *L'Advision* with which, beyond a brief consideration of Opinion's appearance, Kelly is less concerned, namely the location of Opinion within a discursive environment that is sporadically but significantly attentive to the phenomenological, the

²⁸ 'Pour ce te veuil reprendre en aucune partie de tes ditz en ton livre intitulé *De la mutation de Fortune* [...] Car [...] trop faillis [...] lors que tu tant auctorisas la puissance de Dame Fortune que tu la dis estre toute ordonnerresse des fais qui cuerent entre les hommes, et ma puissance souveraine sur toutes influences reflexibles es euvres communes, qui precelle toutes autres, tu oublias'. Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 75; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 74 (I have changed the word order slightly in the translation).

²⁹ 'Bien respondis! Or t'ay vaincue par ton meismes jugement': Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 75; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 74.

³⁰ Kelly, *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion*, p. 20.

³¹ Kelly, *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion*, pp. 34–35, 61.

³² Kelly, *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion*, p. 72.

³³ Kelly, *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion*, pp. 74–76. For a further discussion of the importance of this revisionism in *L'Advision*, see Semple, 'The Consolation of a Woman Writer'.

experiential, and to sensory modes of discovery.³⁴ In the text's closing pages, Philosophy wishes to guide Christine to 'l'utilité de ton sens' ('the good use of your senses'), which is 'the end of the true happiness'.³⁵ This suggestive equation between the 'good' use of the senses and the *telos* of a human life is fitting in a work in which the translation of modes of discovery into visual and almost tactile imagery persists right until the last paragraph, and a moment at which Christine describes the three parts of *L'Advision* respectively as having the properties of the hard diamond, the cameo, 'in which several faces and different figures are printed' and the ruby, 'bright, radiant, and unclouded — which has the property of pleasing one more the more one gazes upon it'.³⁶ If, as Kelly observes, each of the book's three parts 'begins in chaos' — chaos generated by the recent histories of France, the church and schools, and the author herself — such chaos is, nevertheless, crucial to provoking the desire-driven dreaming that is the engine of the text from the beginning of Book I, when Christine's miraculously mobile spirit is beguiled by a 'merveille', 'wondrous phenomenon'.³⁷ And through the conception of a gem that pleases the more one gazes at it, Christine metaphorically suggests that enlightenment is transactional and co-created, as dependent on the intensity and duration of the observer's gaze as it is on the intrinsic properties of the object.

Opinion's charisma derives, in my view, from her ability to enlist both Christine and her reader in a process of enquiry and research. Unlike Lady Philosophy, who is identified very early on in Book III, Opinion makes Christine, and her reader, work hard to locate her on a mental map, and thus securely to identify her. She is neither benign nor malign, fruitful nor wasteful; she can both mislead individuals and incite them towards the cultivation of wisdom and certain knowledge. And as the absorbing and unsettling narrative of her operation in the history of ideas develops, it becomes clear that she works reflexively, not merely calling forth, but mirroring the capacities, and the limitations, of all who

³⁴ Kelly discusses Opinion's colours and shadows in Kelly, *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion*, p. 43.

³⁵ 'la conclusion de la vraie felicité': Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 137; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 129.

³⁶ 'en qui plusieurs visaiges et figures diverses sont empraintes'; 'precieux, cler et resplendissant et sans nue obscure, qui a propriété de tant plus plaire comme plus on le regarde': Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 142; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 134.

³⁷ Kelly, *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion*, p. 71; Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 14; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 20.

engage her, and being as likely to challenge them as to instigate in them the path towards certain knowledge. Most importantly for our concerns here, without Opinion there would be no research, no curiosity, no compelling intellectual quest: 'I have the nature of inciting research and inquiry, and I was created for this'.³⁸ But such research, such enquiry into one's environment and history, is not only transacted at the level of intellectual inquiry. At the beginning of Book II, the first appearance of Opinion threatens to overwhelm the senses and the intellect, and the thickness of the description here is instrumental in ensuring that, while enumerating details, the narrative voice revises and amends the perceptions that they produce:

Then just as I pricked up my ears to listen, the sense of my sight went before that of my hearing. For lifting my eyes, I saw flying among them a great, feminine, bodiless shadow as if a spiritual thing quite strange in nature. And experience proved that she was preternatural, for this substance I saw as a single shadow, yet more than a hundred thousand million (indeed innumerable) parts — some large, others small, others smaller still — was she creating from herself; then these parts of the shadow assembled as if by great crowds such as clouds make in the sky or birds flying in flocks together. But there were more of them than all the birds who ever flew. So the groups were differentiated each from the other by their colours; for by all the colours that have ever existed and more were they differentiated one from the other [...]. And just as the colours of these shadows were set apart in groups, so were their forms. For there was no body, be it of human, strange beast, bird, sea monster, serpent, nor anything that God might have ever formed, indeed of the highest celestial substances or of anything whatsoever that thought can present to the imagination, whose form was not present.³⁹

³⁸ 'Je ay propriété de faire encerchier verité et de l'enquerir, et fus faicte pour celle cause': Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 57; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 57.

³⁹ 'Lors, si comme l'oreille vouloie tendre a escouter, adonc le sens de ma veue preceda celui de m'oïe. Car, en haulçant mes yeulx, avisay voulant entre yceulx une grant ombre feminine sans corps, si comme chose esperituelle de trop estrange nature. Et qu'elle fust merueilleuse, l'experience prouvoit; car celle chose veioie estre une seulle ombre, mais plus de cent mil millions, voire innombrables parties, les unes grandes, les autres mendres, autres plus petites de soy elle faisoit; puis s'assembloient les parties d'ombre comme par grans tourbes si que font nues ou ciel ou oyselles volans par tas ensemble. Mais plus en y avoit que oncques oysialz ne volerent. Si estoient ces tourbes separees les unes des autres ainsi comme les couleours d'elles se differoient, car de toutes les couleours qui oncques furent et de plus que oncques n'en fu estoient differenciees les unes des autres [...]. Et tout ainsi comme les couleours d'icelles ombres par tourbes se differoient, semblablement faisoient leurs fourmes. Car il n'est corps de creature humaine ne d'estrange beste, oysel, monstre de mer, serpent ne chose que Dieux formast oncques, voire des

Opinion — feminine but bodiless, a single phenomenon that ceaselessly generates innumerable others — is here described in terms of a multiplication of entities that threatens to saturate the senses and the reader's powers of visualization. A reader's mind that can easily construct for itself the image of a flying shadow may nevertheless be challenged by the immediate fragmentation of that image into 'innombrables parties' ('innumerable parts'). Likewise, the simile involving birds is no sooner laid suggestively before the reader than it is revised on the grounds that it is inadequate for the description of this phenomenon. Furthermore, shadows are later overwritten by colours, and the description culminates in complete saturation of the imaginative faculty. This poetics of multiplication, of pluralities, and excess marked by the use of hyperbole, is but one way of imagining the state of knowledge *per speculum et in aenigmate*, just as when the shadows generated by Opinion fuel the provisionality of scholastic disputation:

I saw [that] these groups of shadows flying through the air surrounded all the clerks disputing in the said schools. And before the one who wished to propose his question might speak, one of these shadows would come to whisper in his ear, as if to advise him what to say. Afterwards, when another would wish to respond or reply, another shadow would also come to whisper in his ear. And thus there was no disputant who did not have around his head one, two, three, four, or even more, who were all advising him.⁴⁰

In the narrative environment of *L'Advision*, as the reader gradually assembles pieces of information about Opinion herself, this attentive information-gathering itself, no less than the subsequent processes of synthesis and analysis, are all as important as the delayed outcome in which Opinion is positively identified. Indeed, engagement in such processes could be regarded as a legitimate outcome in itself, as is implied in the final chapter of Book II, when Opinion

plus haultes choses celestielles et de tout quanque pensee puet presenter a la fantasie, dont n'y eust la fourme'. Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, pp. 51–52; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, pp. 53–54.

⁴⁰ 'D'icelles tourbes d'ombres qui par l'air vouloient, je veoie tous avironnez les clers disputans es dictes escolles. Et avant que cellui qui vouloit proposer sa question parlast, une de ces ombres lui venoit sacouter a l'oreille, comme se elle lui conseillast ce qu'il devoit dire. Après, quant l'autre vouloit respondre ou repliquer, une autre ombre lui aloit semblablement sacouter. Et ainsi n'y avoit la nul arguent qui n'en eust autour de son chief ou une ou II ou III ou IIII ou plus grant quantité qui toutes le conseilloyent'. Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, pp. 52–53; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 54.

finally challenges Christine, in the idiom of an enigma (*in aenigmate*, as it were): 'Now explain clearly what you think I am'.⁴¹

Kelly sees the 'chaos' with which Book II, the book of Opinion, commences, as evoking 'the chaos of religion occasioned by heresies and the schism, and that of philosophies whose diversity mirrors the rent robe of Boethius's Philosophy'.⁴² But even though these scholars sometimes come to blows because of the shadows of Opinion, it is important to note that Christine's narrator is disinclined to interpret this situation in one way only. It requires reflection and constant reconsideration. It is hard enough to bring the shadows into focus: 'they had to be coloured [...] yet all of them [...] were so transparent that one saw right through them, except for a few so opaque that one saw nothing at all'.⁴³ The shadows belonging to philosophy 'estoient comme fleurs de diverses façons et couleurs' ('were like flowers [...] so that it was most lovely to be there'). Cumulatively, the description of the shadows forces the reader to peer, reflect, wonder, ruminate, mirroring the state of the narrator: 'm'esmerveilleoit et fort a comprendre m'estoit ce que je veoie' ('I was perplexed and it was hard for me to understand that which I saw').⁴⁴ And while this 'intent watching', knowledge-gathering by the senses, is inevitably supplanted by a dialogue with Opinion herself, it could be argued that the state of perplexity that induces the watching is a necessary prolegomenon to that dialogue. Thus, while it would be true to say that the quasi-autobiographical superstructure of *L'Advision* allows Christine to model the changing of minds by projecting the changing of her own, it is equally important to recognize that this transformation may also be taking place at levels other than that of explicit argumentation within the text's many dialogues. Fenster points out that in *L'Advision*, 'what can be known by the senses is but the first step', and that the work 'is not a performance, nor does its prose allow it to be'.⁴⁵ But she also rightly acknowledges that *L'Advision*'s mode of procedure is 'ruminative', and thus, as a thoughtful text in every sense, it provides a vivid example of the way in which a vernacular humanist text

⁴¹ '[D]iffinis de moy ce qu'il t'en semble': Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 90; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 86.

⁴² Kelly, *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion*, p. 71.

⁴³ 'Colourees convenoit que elles fussent [...] mais transparans [...] si que on veoit parmi, aucques toutes estoient fors d'aucunes si troubles que l'en n'y veoit grain ne goute': Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 53; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 55.

⁴⁴ Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, pp. 53–54; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, p. 55.

⁴⁵ Fenster, 'Ways of Knowing in the *Songe veritable*', p. 214.

might solicit a continuously dynamic relationship with the mind of its reader. And Opinion — who focuses discursive potential, ambiguity and charisma in equal measures; who is, most importantly of all, inventive; who services the continuous human need for discourse; who provokes and persuades — is an essential catalyst in that relationship. As she says of herself, 'Desire for Knowledge engendered me'. Implicated in the Fall, she nevertheless gives Adam the resourcefulness to survive. And most importantly, she is not only a catalyst but also a mediator, conveying 'messages from clear-witted men to Philosophy' and allowing human beings access to the truth 'through the labour of inquiry'.⁴⁶ There thus subsists, in my view, a fruitful tension between the text's ultimate containment of Opinion by Philosophy and Theology, and its recognition of the necessity for the temporary, inchoate but often intense states of inventive potential that she makes possible.

II

Notwithstanding the ambiguous potential that Opinion represents so suggestively and memorably, it is clear that the transformation of Lady Philosophy into Lady Theology at the end of *L'Advision* is intended conclusively to represent the ascendancy of more certain forms of knowledge — specifically, religious knowledge. For whatever the individual reader's cumulative *experience* of the narrative as an arena for wonder, inquiry, gradual discovery, sifting and reconsideration, it cannot be denied that the *argument* of *L'Advision* points ineluctably towards the containment of Opinion. As Kelly points out, Christine 'excludes articles of faith from the realm of opinion'.⁴⁷ To Christine, he argues, 'there is no opinion in God's mind'.⁴⁸ It is fitting, therefore, that in responding to Opinion's final challenge that she be positively identified, Christine should sample not only Aristotle but also a reformist from an earlier period, St Bernard of Clairvaux: 'And St Bernard also says in the fifth chapter of the *Considerations* that you are ambiguous and can be deceived'.⁴⁹ I briefly consider St Bernard's

⁴⁶ Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, pp. 54–55; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, pp. 56–57.

⁴⁷ Kelly, *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion*, p. 32.

⁴⁸ Kelly, *Christine de Pizan's Changing Opinion*, p. 45.

⁴⁹ 'Et saint Bernard aussi dit ou V^e chappitre de *Consideracion*, que vous estes ambigue et puez estre deceue': Christine de Pizan, *L'Advision*, ed. by Reno and Dulac, p. 90; *The Vision*, trans. by McLeod and Willard, pp. 86–87.

words in their original context here in order to show how his treatise preserves the stable distinctions between *fides*, *scientia*, and *opinio* that Pecock would elide in his vernacular experiments, and thus to show how those experiments take opinion in a radically different direction from that explored, and ultimately contained, by Christine.

In the last book of his charitable admonitions to Pope Eugene III (completed in 1152–53), St Bernard had required Eugene to consider the things of God, and the means by which they might be considered. Book V of *De consideratione* is, therefore, a contribution to a long medieval lineage of works appraising the epistemology of faith, and it lucidly and authoritatively represents the rigorous distinctions between *fides* (faith), *opinio*, and *intellectus* (understanding) that would persist in scholastic discourse long afterwards:

Of these, understanding relies on reason, faith on authority and opinion is supported only by a semblance of truth. Two of these possess certain truth: but that of faith is hidden and obscure, that of understanding is bare and manifest. Opinion, on the other hand, possesses no certainty but seeks truth through what appears true rather than grasping hold of it.⁵⁰

This distinction is fervently consolidated in the following section, in which Bernard counsels Eugene to avoid confusion ‘so that faith does not fasten onto the uncertainty of opinion or opinion call in question what is firm and fixed in faith’ (‘ne [...] aut incertum opinionis fides figat, aut quod firmum fixumque est fidei, opinio revocet in quaestionem’).⁵¹ His desire to prevent such confusion leads him to define these modes of knowing further:

We can define each of these as follows: faith is a kind of voluntary and sure foretaste of truth not yet evident; understanding is a sure and manifest knowledge of something not seen; opinion is to hold something as true which you do not know to be false. Therefore, as I said, faith possesses nothing which is uncertain, for if it does, it is not faith, but opinion. How, then, does it differ from understanding? Even though faith is no more uncertain than understanding, still it is wrapped in mystery which understanding is not. Finally, what you have understood is not

⁵⁰ ‘Quorum intellectus rationi innitur, fides auctoritati, opinio sola veri similitudine se tueretur. Habent illa duo certam veritatem, sed fides clausam et involutam, intelligentia nudam et manifestam; ceterum opinio, certi nihil habens, verum per veri similia quaerit potius quam apprehendit’. Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione*, ed. by Lerclerq and Rochais, 18–22 (p. 470); translated in *Five Books on Consideration*, trans. by Anderson and Kennan, p. 144.

⁵¹ Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione*, ed. by Lerclerq and Rochais, 23–24 (p. 470); *On Consideration*, trans. by Anderson and Kennan, p. 144.

something you can inquire further about, for if it is, you have not understood it. Now, we prefer to know nothing more than that which we already know by faith. Our happiness will lack nothing when that which is already certain to us will be equally evident.⁵²

'Faith possesses nothing which is uncertain, for if it does, it is not faith, but opinion'. The boundaries between these modes of knowing could not be clearer in St Bernard's treatise, protected as they are by a Latin lexicon that permits and preserves distinction, delineation and nuance. Similarly, when Aquinas commented on I Corinthians 13. 12 — the proof-text for Pecock's later assertions about *uncerteynte* — his discussion of Pauline epistemology resulted in careful use of the language of sight (*visio*) and cognition (*cognitio*), not that of faith, understanding and opinion. Aquinas asserted that the whole of creation is like a mirror to human beings, because they derive knowledge through it in this life: 'by means of order, goodness, magnitude — which are brought about in things by God — we acquire knowledge of wisdom, goodness, and divine eminence. And this knowledge is called "seeing through a glass"'.⁵³ When compared both with the semantic field in Latin through which such distinctions and nuances were maintained, and with Christine's rigorous exclusion of opinion from the realm of theology in her own vernacular experiments, the collapsing of such conceptual and semantic boundaries in Pecock's 'opynyonal feith' is clearly revealed as a consequence of two closely related factors: translation and pragmatism.

Pecock had come to intellectual maturity during the aftermath of the Wycliffite controversies. Although his extant English prose works cannot be definitively dated, it is clear that he was writing from the 1430s to the 1450s. He has gradually found a place in English literary and intellectual history not only as a respondent to, and opponent of, Wycliffite ideas, but also, more positively, as

⁵² 'Possumus singula haec ita diffinire; fides est voluntaria quaedam et certa prelibatio necdum propalatae veritatis; intellectus est rei cuiuscunque invisibilis certa et manifesta notitia; opinio est quasi pro vero habere aliquid, quod falsum esse nescias. Ergo, ut dixi, fides ambiguum non habet; aut si habet, fides non est, sed opinio. Quid igitur distat ab intellectu? Nempe quod, etsi non habet incertum non magis quam intellectus, habet tamen involucrum, quod non intellectus. Denique quod intellexisti, non est de eo quod ultra quaeras: aut si est, non intellexisti. Nil autem malumus scire, quam quae fide iam scimus. Nil supererit ad beatitudinem, cum, quae jam certa sunt nobis, erunt aequae et nuda'. Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione*, ed. by Lerclercq and Rochais, 7–16 (p. 471); *On Consideration*, trans. by Anderson and Kennan, p. 145.

⁵³ 'quia ex ordine, et bonitate, et magnitudine, quae in rebus a Deo causata sunt, venimus in cognitionem sapientiae, bonitatis et eminentiae divinae. Et haec cognitio dicitur visio in speculo': Thomas Aquinas, *Super epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, ed. by Cai, I, p. 387 (my translation).

one of a constellation of English reformist thinkers in a lineage extending back into the fourteenth century, whose constructive and self-critical intra-clerical conversations had been distorted by the necessity of responding to the specific kinds of reform proposed by Wyclif and his followers, for whom intraclerical auto-critique had tipped over into wholesale anticlericalism.⁵⁴ It has long been recognized that the vernacular theological programme that he offered to the laity was singular and pioneering, even though it was spectacularly unsuccessful. As we have already seen, his vernacular theological taxonomy (as laid out in *The Folewer to the Donet* and later reprised in *The Book of Faith*), involved a single distinction between 'sciencial feiþ' and 'opynyonal feiþ', foundational components of a vernacular *summa theologiae* that was quite distinct, in its intellectualized perspective, from the competing theologies, whether driven by affectivity, patristics or preaching, that were valued and promulgated by his contemporaries among the avowedly orthodox.

In *The Folewer to the Donet*, Pecock had defined 'opynyoun' as 'a knowing wherbi we knowen not certeynli and undoutabili (*without doubt*), but oonli likely, and þat by likli eydencis rising out of and bi þe þing in it silf to be trowid (*believed*), or bi summe purtenauncis (*properties*) or circumstauncis of it, and not bi strengþ of eny persones testimony, þat it is trewe'.⁵⁵ The lack of 'testimony' here is important, in that it will subsequently enable him to distinguish between opinion in itself, and 'opynyonal feiþ'. The relationship between these two is clearly analogical, in order that faith remain uncontaminated by association with simple opinion, and Pecock works hard in a subsequent chapter to delineate them, pointing out that 'opynyonal feiþ' is derived from a trustworthy source, the testimony that 'opynyoun' lacks. For him, faith is strongly associated with 'credence', and represented by an internal syllogism, a probable conclusion, that someone forms within themselves when confirming the truth of another's testimony ('an argument maad of us silf in oure owen resoun').⁵⁶ Even the 'sciencial' faith that exists in heaven is said to take syllogistic form in the inner 'resoun' of the blessed.⁵⁷ Even the apostles, who saw Christ in person and learned from him, only had 'opynyonal feiþ' in his teachings, because their internal syllogisms were constructed from premisses taken from 'opynyal

⁵⁴ For these developments, see the essays collected in Gillespie and Ghosh, *After Arundel*; Bose, 'The Opponents of John Wyclif'; Bose, 'Writing, Heresy and the Anticlerical Muse'.

⁵⁵ Pecock, *The Folewer to the Donet*, ed. by Hitchcock, p. 64.

⁵⁶ Pecock, *The Folewer to the Donet*, ed. by Hitchcock, p. 69.

⁵⁷ Pecock, *The Folewer to the Donet*, ed. by Hitchcock, p. 70.

bilecue (*belief*) by opire likli argumentis maad renne upon (*constructed on the basis of*) his greet myraclis and opire deeds'.⁵⁸

This emphasis on a faith in which inner conviction must take syllogistic form is not the luxurious product of sheltered scholarly rumination; rather, as Pecock makes clear in *The Book of Faith*, it is the pragmatic result of extramural engagement that had convinced him of the need to offer philosophical theology to the laity. He argues that his vernacularization of theological method is a direct consequence of his singular position in the landscape of avowed orthodoxy. He responds to what he sees as a dereliction of duty by the clergy, who have left the faith vulnerable to lay disaffection because they are not ready to express its truths in rational forms: they 'laboren not [...] forto considere clerli what feith is in his own kinde, and whiche ben (*are*) the evydencis wherbi it schulde be proved, and forto dispose tho (*those*) evydencis in cleer formal maner of silogisme, and to have hem redi at mynde'.⁵⁹ This leads to further reformist castigation of the clergy who, he argues, have neglected the civilized business of persuasion in favour of coercion:

[...] lete al the clergie of divinite bese (*busy*) hem silf (*themselves*) wisely in this mater [...] leste her necligence schal accuse hem (*them*) in tyme to come, that bi her necligence trewe feith was overthrowe, and men fro (*from*) it perverted, and that trewe feith was not sufficiently proved and meyntened bi hem, and bi meenys (*means, materials*) whiche thei leeven in writing aftir hem, for to bi cleer witt (*rationally, lucidly*) drawe men into consente of trewe feith otherwise than bi fier (*fire*) and swerd or hangement.⁶⁰

It is the need to 'drawe men into consente of trewe feith' that fuels Pecock's re-conception of faith *tout court* as 'opinial feith', mediated through valid testimony from reliable intermediaries and corroborated by inward syllogizing. His intriguing vision of scholastic disputation extending not only beyond the schools, but even as far as the minds of intensely syllogizing individuals, speaks to his belief in the power of intellectual activity to reform and redirect the religious lives of the laity. But there is a price to pay for this. Notwithstanding Pecock's painstaking efforts at preserving refinements and distinctions in his vernacular terminology ('pi knowing is not intellect neiþir wisdom neiþir science neiþir prudence neiþir craft'), it is also possible to see how a spacious scholastic

⁵⁸ Pecock, *The Folewer to the Donet*, ed. by Hitchcock, p. 71.

⁵⁹ Pecock, *Book of Faith*, ed. by Morison, p. 131.

⁶⁰ Pecock, *Book of Faith*, ed. by Morison, p. 139.

lexicon that accommodated both nuance and rumination, and distinguished carefully between vision, cognition, and modes of understanding, has been truncated and elided — if ingeniously so — in the less protected environment of his vernacular treatises.⁶¹ Despite turning ‘opynyoun’ into an adjective with a generous semantic range that encompasses all faith ‘comounli had in this lijf’, Pecock had carefully insisted that such faith was not to be confused with mere opinion. Like Christine, he closely associated the realm of opinion with the function of mediation which, according to his understanding, took the forms of testimony and rational articulation. But in daring to collocate ‘feith’ and ‘opynyoun’ at all, he had gone several steps further than Christine, who had allowed Opinion to mediate suggestively between chaos and greater certainty, but had also kept her carefully quarantined from Philosophy and Theology.

In his contribution to this volume, Kantik Ghosh locates his discussion in ‘an extramural milieu of religio-intellectual enquiry’, further characterized as a ‘deregulated economy’ in which philosophical and theological discourses leak into the world beyond the schools, with the consequent risks of unsubtle or inaccurate appraisals and translations of those discourses.⁶² In many ways I have addressed here some of the consequences of the process that he describes, for the writers that I have discussed here provocatively reveal the reverse of the intellectual tapestry assembled in his essay. Their extramural stances served reformist purposes in allowing them the freedom to scrutinize and reorder bodies of knowledge, and hence to capitalize on the possibilities for vernacular experimentation unleashed by the ‘deregulated economy’, whose various consequences are his subject. In the case of both Pecock and Christine, we hear an exploratory writer energized both by the opportunity of crafting a written voice in discursive territory far from the controlled and protective setting of the scholastic disputation, and by the prospect of making up his or her own rules about the hierarchy of knowledge and its relationship to the individual subject.

Pecock was on occasion capable of a seminal image, such as when he imagined the law of nature imprinted by God on every individual as a forest (‘forest of lawe of kinde’) planted at birth: ‘And out of this forest of treuthis mowe (*must*) be take treuthis and conclusiouns, and be sett into open knowing of the fynder and of othere men, thoup not withoute labour and studie

⁶¹ Pecock, *The Folewer to the Donet*, ed. by Hitchcock, p. 69.

⁶² Ghosh, ‘Logic, Scepticism and “Heresy” in Early Fifteenth-Century Europe’, below, pp. 261–83.

thorup(*through*) manie þeeris (*years*).⁶³ In its modest way, this is his conception of a 'path of long study', not unlike that of Christine, and it is testimony to his belief that the changing of minds effected through argument and reading was an essentially slow process. Hence, too, his argument, in the prologue to the *Book of Faith*, that his books 'must be distributid [...] abroad to manye' so that the 'seid erring persoonys' who were his imagined audience should 'take longe leiser (*leisure*), forto sadli (*seriously*) and oft (*often*) overrede (*re-read*) tho bokis, unto tyme thei schulen be wel aqueyntid with [...] the skilis (*arguments*) and motives therynne written'.⁶⁴ The emphasis on 'over-reading' seems to me significant, implicitly associated as it is with processes of rumination and reconsideration, albeit of very different kinds from those staged by Christine in *L'Advisioun*. In their respective vernacular arenas, therefore, these two authors choose to foreground and express their different subjectivities by similar means, both focusing intently on the contents and operation of the thinking mind. In this essay I have sought to emphasize not only the vitality of their engagements with opinion, but also the radical differences between those engagements — differences that are themselves testimony to the diversity of intellectual experimentation being undertaken in the first half of the fifteenth century. But in each case, Opinion presides over a parallel world in which revisionist conversations can take place, and error can be subject to auto-correction in a self-authorizing environment, whether through the exploratory and corrective post-Boethian dialogues in which Christine's narrators engage, or through the paternalistic but still discursively spacious arenas of 'dialogazacioun' staged by Pecock.⁶⁵ A literary history concerned with acts of thinking should, therefore, easily accommodate writers as diverse as these, aware as they both appear to have been of the neuroplastic potential of the mind, whether it be engaged in the internal business of reading, rumination and learning, or suspended in the fertile void between inquiries.⁶⁶

⁶³ Pecock, *The Repressor*, ed. by Babington, I, p. 29.

⁶⁴ Pecock, *Book of Faith*, ed. by Morison, p. 116.

⁶⁵ Pecock, *Book of Faith*, ed. by Morison, p. 122.

⁶⁶ I am grateful to Dallas G. Denery II, Kantik Ghosh, Nicolette Zeeman, and also Brian Young, for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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LOGIC, SCEPTICISM, AND 'HERESY' IN EARLY FIFTEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE: OXFORD, VIENNA, CONSTANCE

Kantik Ghosh

Later medieval Europe witnessed a rapid transformation of the discursive landscape of various European vernaculars, as well as of Latin, partly as the result of a growing diversity of textual genres indebted to academic philosophy and theology which nevertheless had as actual or intended audience an extramural readership. Speculative thought traditionally couched in the specialized idioms, techniques, and methods of university-learning and its procedures began to be deployed in a far freer, looser manner, with polemics of various kinds — often including those of a strong anticlerical or anti-intellectual bent — blending academic method and terminology with controversial argumentation of immediate social or political import. In their eagerness to define themselves as 'orthodox', establishments (including the divided papacy and, later, the conciliar hierarchy, and, increasingly, various universities), when they found themselves in opposition to such polemics, sought to align them with 'heresy', a concept variously defined and contested in theory, and equally variously deployed on the ground in inquisitorial practice. As a result, the inherited (and never fully codified) means of controlling and delimiting the potential impact of ideas debated in the Schools by processes of academic censure became intertwined with the distinct, but comparably messy, domain of the prosecution of 'heretics'. Complex questions of academic method, philosophical theology, and the logico-linguistic discourses central to later scholasticism therefore began to

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play an increasingly visible role in both intra- and extramural disciplinary and inquisitorial procedures. The following essay will argue that underlying this development were first, a deepening realization of the radical sceptical potential of scholastic analytic-speculative engagement with the meanings and forms of religious certitude, and, second, as corollary, an anxious desire to contain its impact on (in particular) biblical hermeneutics, sacramental theory, and ecclesiology.

It was in England, courtesy of John Wyclif (d. 1384) and his followers, that these processes first found explicit (and sensational) expression, and we may begin by considering the following passage from an early fifteenth-century vernacular Wycliffite text:

[...] our new sects [...] [should] have claimed only Christ for their founder [...] and not thus denied Christ and his church [...] saying thus: 'I am of Benedict', 'I am of Bernard', 'I of Francis', 'I of Dominic', 'and I of Augustine' [...]. And so such sects bring in many errors and heresies. For it has ever been the case that diverse and contradictory opinions have multiplied according to the diversity and number of sects. For instance, among heathen men, there were diverse sects of philosophers: some of Plato, some of Aristotle, some of Anaxagoras, and some of Democritus. And all these sects, and many others which existed then, were of diverse opinions and contradicted one another in many things. As examples, I will present some of their opinions here. Plato and his sect, whom Augustine praises above all others, said that the world had a beginning; however, Aristotle and his sect assert the contrary; indeed even now among Christian men [is this opinion asserted]. And Plato and his sect say that two points or indivisible things stand together in a straight line without any intermediary, and also that two instants or indivisible things in time are so close together, one after another in the course of time, that there is no intervening instant. But Aristotle and his sect in both these opinions overturn Plato and his sect. For Aristotle and his sect say that however close two points are in a straight line, there is a long line in between them, comprising as many points as there are in the entire world. And in the same way, they say that however closely two instants follow each other in the course of time, there is a long interval separating the two, comprising as many instants as there ever have been and shall be between the creation of the world and its end. And this seems a great and evident untruth, even for a master liar! And the other two sects of philosophers that I spoke of differ from these two in some things: indeed it is hard, in my opinion, to find two such sects who agree in everything.¹

¹ I am grateful to Pavlína Rychterová for her generosity with her expertise on Hussitism, and to Anne Hudson and my co-editors for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

('[...] oure newe sectis [...] [should] haue cleymed oonli Crist for her founder [...] and not þus dynyed Crist and his chirche [...] seiynge þus [...] 'I am of Benet', 'I am of Bernard', 'I of Fraunceis', 'I of Domyntyk', 'and I of Austyn' [...]. And so suche sectis bryngen yn manye errours

Such are the views of a so-called 'sermon',² written by an anonymous English Wycliffite polemicist probably with Oxford affiliations, ostensibly on the subject of clerical temporalities. The author compares contemporary monastic and fraternal orders (Benedictines, Cistercians, Franciscans, Dominicans, Austins, and Carmelites) and their diversity of rules and self-definition, to what he describes as 'diverse sects of heathen philosophers' who are characterized by their predilection for diverse and contrary opinions. Examples adduced of such opinions take the form of allusive references to theories of creation, and of atomism, indivisibility, and continuity, these latter subjects dear to the heart of John Wyclif in his theology of the Eucharist,³ but with no indication given

and heresies. For euere it haþ stonde þus þat dyuerse and contrarie opynyouns han be multiplied, after þe dyuersitie or noumbre of sectis. As among þe heþen men weren dyuerse sectis of filosofris, as summe were of Plato, summe were of Aristotle, summe were of Anaxagaras, summe of Democritus. And alle þese sectis, and many mo þat weren þanne, weren of dyuerse opynyouns and in many þingis contrarie. And summe of her opynyouns for ensauple I shal shewe here. As Plato and his sect, whom Austyn preisþ aboue alle oþir, seiþ þat þe world hadde a bigynning; but Aristotle and his sect seien þe contrarie, 3he among christen zit into þis dai. Also Plato and his sect seien þat two poyntis or indiuisable þingis stonden togidir in a ri3t lyne wiþoute ony mene, and also þat two instantis or indiuisable þingis in tyme come so ny3 togidir, oon aftir anoþer in cours of tyme þat þer goiþ no tyme bitwene hem. But Aristotle and his sect in boþe þese opynyouns reuersen Plato and his sect. For Aristotle and his sect seien þat alwei bitwene two poyntis in a ri3t lyne, stonde þei neuere so ny3 togider, is a long lyne bitwene, 3he and as many poyntis as ben in al þe world. And on þe same wise þei seien of tyme þat, hou so euere ny3 two instantis comen, oon aftir anoþir in cours of tyme, þer cometh a long tyme bitwene hem, and as many instantis as were fro þe bigynning of þe world and shal be into þe eende. And þis semeth a lesyng alowd and an opun yno3, þou3 it were for þe wheston! And þe toþir two sectis of filosofris þat I spak of in sum thing varien fro þese two — 3he it is hard, as I suppose, to fynde two suche sectis þat acorden in al'.) From the sermon *Omnis plantacio*, in *The Works of a Lollard Preacher*, ed. by Hudson, pp. 24–25, ll. 607–47. On the vast vernacular output of the English followers of John Wyclif, sometimes known as 'lollards' (including complete translations of the Bible, long cycles of sermons, polemical tracts, exegesis, encyclopaedic material), see Hudson, *The Premature Reformation*, esp. cc. 4–5, 9, pp. 174–277; 390–445; also her collected papers in Hudson, *Lollards and their Books*, and most recently, Hudson, 'Five Problems in Wycliffite Texts and a Suggestion'.

² On the dating of this sermon, see *The Works of a Lollard Preacher*, ed. by Hudson, pp. l–li.

³ See Michael, 'John Wyclif's Atomism'; Kretzmann, 'Continua, Indivisibles and Change in Wyclif's Logic of Scripture'; Lahey, *John Wyclif*, pp. 109–31. Wyclif's atomist theses would later be condemned as anathema at the Council of Constance. On theories of creation and their invocation in the context of debates about the interrelationship of philosophy and theology, for example by Marsilius of Inghen, who clarifies how philosophers, speaking *ex puris naturalibus*, must deny creation *ex nihilo*, see the discussion in Hoenen, 'Nominalismus als universitäre Spekulationskontrolle', pp. 362–63.

here of their controversial sacramental import. Instead, the vernacular sermon assumes a tone of sceptical dismissal: disagreement and conflict are not seen as the prerequisites for the search for truth through the honing of logical and dialectical skills, but rather as symptomatic of the fundamentally misguided nature of intellectual enquiry as it finds discursive institutionalization in academia. Indeed, the sermon-writer proceeds to point out that the various 'sects' of 'apostates' that, in his view, characterize the contemporary church, seek to defend their (indefensible) self-justifying theses by labouring 'industriously in the Schools, in preaching and in private exchanges, as is well known to clerks in our country and also in foreign countries'.⁴ Here and elsewhere, the author projects himself both as clerk, *au courant* with important trends in academic philosophy and theology, and as a critic who dismisses the whole enterprise of speculative thought as wholly implicated in 'errors' and 'heresies' (these words themselves part of the vocabulary developed in the medieval Church and university to distinguish between various degrees of false belief and teaching).⁵ The fact that all this is presented in a vigorous and inventive vernacular idiom — with various philosophical schools being described with the polemically freighted word 'sect'⁶ — further complicates the positioning of academic thought and its methods *vis-à-vis* an extramural milieu of religio-intellectual enquiry. This author famously ends his sermon with an assurance that a written copy would be left behind for circulation and further study, with the intention of countering any criticism:

I purpose [intend] to leue it writun among 3ou, and whoso likip mai ouerse [look through] it [...]. And of anopir þing I beseche [ask] 3ou here þat, if ony aduersarie of myn replie azens ony conclusioun þat I haue shewid to 3ou at þis tyme, reportip redili hise euydencis [report back his arguments to me quickly/properly], and

⁴ *The Works of a Lollard Preacher*, ed. by Hudson, p. 27, ll. 694–96: 'ful bisili and ofte tyme in scool, in preching and in priue comunyng, as it is knowun to þe clerkis of oure rewme and in alien rewmes boþe'.

⁵ On the vocabulary of assessment of suspect academic propositions, see Thijssen, *Censure and Heresy at the University of Paris*, c. 1, pp. 1–39; Putallaz, 'Censorship'; and most recently, Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, p. 12.

⁶ Aston, 'Were the Lollards a Sect?'; Aston cites Aquinas (citing Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*) on the identification of 'sect' with 'heresy' (p. 168). The followers of Wyclif often presented themselves as of the 'sect of Christ', the only 'true sect' as opposed to all other, of necessity 'heretical', sects (pp. 177–78). Anti-heretical polemic habitually identified heretics with sectarian division, as opposed to the whole and unified true Church: see Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics*, pp. 33–36.

nameli [particularly] if he take ony eydence or colour of hooli scripture [adduces arguments based on or pretending to be based on holy scripture], and, if almyȝti God wole vouchesaaf to graunte me grace or leiser [leisure] to declare myself in þese poyntis þat I haue moued [touched upon] in þis sermoun, I shal þoruȝ þe help of him in whom is al help declare me [clarify my thought], so þat he shal holde him answerid (*The Works of a Lollard Preacher*, ed. by Hudson, pp. 138–39, ll. 2941–55).

The extramural dissemination of speculative philosophy and theology in vernacular Wycliffite writings, of which this is one example among many, and the generic indeterminacy of such writings⁷ — the text discussed above is an odd mixture of anticlerical polemic, biblical exegesis, and elements of philosophical theology which presents itself simultaneously as a sermon delivered orally⁸ and as a text to be read with close attention — are characteristic of the discursive landscape of early fifteenth-century England. The established Church, especially under the auspices of Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, was particularly exercised by the controversial and disruptive potential of ideas derived from the Schools. As Jeremy Catto has shown,⁹ Arundel and the University of Oxford entered into a long series of confrontations over intellectual jurisdiction and authority, both before and after the promulgation of his censorship statutes (known as the Constitutions) in 1407–09 which, among other things, sought to police the boundaries between university speculation and extramural pedagogy and religiosity.¹⁰ An intriguing chapter in this confrontational engagement between Archbishop and University is provided by the episode of Richard Fleming.

⁷ Daniel Hobbins's discussion of the 'tract' as the favoured late medieval scholastic form is worth noting here: Hobbins, 'The Schoolman as Public Intellectual'; also Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity before Print*, c. 5, pp. 128–51.

⁸ There are several references to its length and the possible impatience of its audience: see *The Works of a Lollard Preacher*, ed. by Hudson, pp. lii–liv. On the use of the sermon form in the papal court as a not uncontroversial forum for more open-ended debate on 'opiniabile' (*opiniabiles*) views, not making the same epistemological claim to truth that a disputation or determination might, see Iribarren, 'Theological Authority at the Papal Court', pp. 286–88.

⁹ Catto, 'Wyclif and Wycliffism at Oxford 1356–1430', esp. pp. 231–53.

¹⁰ For discussion, see Somerset, 'Expanding the Langlandian Canon'; Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change'. Larsen sees Arundel's Constitutions as a 'turning point for *libertas inquirendi* at Oxford', Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, pp. 270–72.

In 1409, Fleming, then MA and a scholar of theology, was accused of maintaining a Wycliffite proposition in a scholastic disputation.¹¹ Arundel, through the Convocation of Canterbury, had already required Oxford University to set up a committee of twelve who would be vigilant for signs of 'heretical depravity' in the University. According to Fleming, five members of the committee declared his proposition to be simply false at the cost of his reputation, with a sixth at least modifying the declaration by adding that it was not absolutely false, but only if the terms were used in the common sense.¹² Fleming appealed to the King that the University should be compelled to hear his appeal against the condemnation; the University then replied to the King begging to be excused from summoning a hasty Congregation, and asserting that no one had condemned Fleming's proposition absolutely, but only according to the common sense of the terms. The committee further added that the observation had been made only for the good of Fleming:

since they had not made any accusation against the aforesaid Master Richard [Fleming], as [the Committee] assert, since they declared a certain proposition (conceded by him in his academic disputation/exercise according to its true sense, which sense was not condemned by them at all) false and spurious, not absolutely and simply but according to the common sense, which the terms commonly indicate, and they, as they assert, made the declaration [of this] to him for the good of the said Richard, and are ready, as they say, to make the declaration again for the contemplation of our majesty.¹³

The King finally asked for an arbitrating committee to decide the issue and restore Fleming's good fame and reputation ('bonam famam et honestatem'), with a reminder to this committee of his royal conviction that there was to be found in Fleming's intention and proposition rather the zeal to advance in

¹¹ The relevant documents are collected in *Snappe's Formulary and Other Records*, ed. by Salter, pp. 95–100, 121–23, 125–28.

¹² *Snappe's Formulary and Other Records*, ed. by Salter, p. 127: 'quorum quinque (ut auditiv) illam propositionem simpliciter in sue honestatis dispendium reprobant, sexto duntaxat modificante ad sensum quem termini communiter pretendunt'.

¹³ *Snappe's Formulary and Other Records*, ed. by Salter, p. 127: 'cum predicto magistro R. grauamen nullum intulerunt, ut [the Committee] asserunt, cum propositionem quondam, in actu suo scolastico ad sensum verum per eos minime reprobatur ab eo concessam, non absolute & simpliciter sed ad communem sensum, quem termini ut communiter pretendunt, reprobant & falsam decreuerunt, & declarationem istius in seruandam honestatem predicti R. eidem (ut asserunt) obtulerunt, & nostre maiestatis contemplationi (ut dicunt) offerre iterum sunt parati'.

divine law and nothing sinister or rash.¹⁴ While this exchange between King and University was taking place, Archbishop Arundel wrote to the University forbidding it to hear Fleming's appeal. The legal reason offered was that the Committee which had condemned Fleming's proposition was appointed by the Convocation of Canterbury and not the University, which could not therefore hear an appeal against its authority. Arundel's letter is a curious specimen, full of inflated anger and contempt for what he describes as Fleming's puerile presumption: he is described as one of the 'elinguēs pueri' ('tongue-tied boys') who

reading before they may spell, impudently swell with such ambition that they are not afraid publicly to assert and, as it were, conclusively to hold and damnably to defend in the Schools certain of the said condemned [Wycliffite] conclusions.¹⁵

Arundel proceeds to speak of the necessity of purging the University of 'evil men, and [the need to] extinguish that spark of dissension before it may be fanned into flames';¹⁶ he also refers, in a suggestive lexis, to the *temeritas* and *pertinacia* of such insolent and puerile dissenters maintaining their 'errors and heresies' who must immediately be brought to heel by the archiepiscopal 'virga et ferula' ('stick and cane').¹⁷

The record of this four-way encounter between a young and ambitious scholar of theology, his university, his archbishop and his king offers revealing if ambiguous insights into the academic milieu of early fifteenth-century England.¹⁸ Both Fleming's and the Oxford Committee's accounts of the confrontation agree on one point: that the condemnation of his controversial proposition was couched in terms of a distinction between the ways in which

¹⁴ *Snappe's Formulary and Other Records*, ed. by Salter, p. 127–28: 'in eius intentione et proposito zelum proficiendi in lege Dei & non aliud sinistrum vel temerarium suspicamur'. Note that 'temerarius' was part of the technical vocabulary of (different grades of) censure, and referred to 'any opinion standing in opposition to common opinion, without being founded on robust reasons': see Putallaz, 'Censorship', p. 107.

¹⁵ *Snappe's Formulary and Other Records*, ed. by Salter, p. 121: 'prius legentes quam syllabice, ponentes os in celum, tanta ambitione tumescant quod certas dictarum conclusionum damnatarum publice asserere et velut conclusionaliter in scolis tenere et defendere damnabiliter non verentur'.

¹⁶ *Snappe's Formulary and Other Records*, ed. by Salter, p. 122: 'malis hominibus, et scintillam illam dissensionis extinguere, antequam accendatur in flammam'.

¹⁷ *Snappe's Formulary and Other Records*, ed. by Salter, p. 122.

¹⁸ The most recent discussion of the procedural mechanics of the case by Larsen concludes that the condemnation is difficult fully to understand: Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, p. 230.

terms may signify, ‘absolutely and/or simply’ on the one hand, and according to the ‘common sense’ or ‘common understanding’ of terms on the other. It appears that the Committee was concerned to point out that Fleming was using technical language in a way that was liable to misinterpretation by those who would apply standards of ordinary speech and understanding, and/or open to criticism according to scholarly consensus about the meaning of technical terms. The Committee’s claim that their critique was meant for the good of a promising young scholar may not have been mere pious self-exculpation, for the controversy over how (logico-)theological discourse ought or ought not to be handled had become a rather heated, indeed explosive, area of debate by the turn of the century. Wyclif’s and John Kenningham’s debate had already broached the subject a few decades earlier, with Kenningham accusing Wyclif of using language which departed from the *usu loquentium* and *communi intellectu*.¹⁹ As Maarten Hoenen points out, the same distinction played an important role in Peter of Ailly’s critique of John of Monzón at the University of Paris c. 1388; Gerson would later make it a central plank of his critique of Wyclif, Hus, and Jerome of Prague, and it would accompany his endorsement of a *stylus theologicus*, as exclusively appropriate for theological discussion, at the Council of Constance.²⁰ This heightened concern about the risks of departing too far from common usage, and the concomitant possibility of misinterpreting the technical logico-linguistic discourses of philosophical theology, seems to have stemmed at least in part from a growing awareness of the impact of such interpretations — interpretations which were unaware of, or

¹⁹ For a discussion of Kenningham’s arguments against Wyclif in his various *determinationes* collected in *Fasciculi zizaniorum*, ed. by Shirley, see Hoenen, ‘Theology and Metaphysics’; Levy, ‘Defining the Responsibility of the Late Medieval Theologian’; Bose, ‘The Opponents of John Wyclif’, pp. 431–36.

²⁰ Gerson’s concern for an appropriate theological style not contradicting common usage arose in important part from his recognition of the nature of scriptural language: ‘The literal sense of Holy Scripture is to be understood not according to the logical or dialectical force [of words], but rather according to usage in rhetorical discourse, and according to tropes and figurative speech which common use engages in, with consideration of the context’ (*‘Sensus litteralis Sacrae Scripturae accipiendus est non secundum vim logicae seu dialecticae, sed potius juxta locutiones in rhetoricis sermonibus usitatas et juxta tropos et figuratas locutiones quas communis usus committit, cum consideratione circumstantiarum litterae’*). See Gerson, *De sensu litterali sacrae scripturae*, ed. by Glorieux, p. 334. For a discussion of d’Ailly, Gerson and the *stylus theologicus*, see Kaluza, ‘Le Chancelier Gerson et Jérôme de Prague’; also see Hoenen, ‘“Modus loquendi platonicorum”’; also Hoenen, ‘Jean Wyclif et les *universalia realia*’; Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity before Print*, c. 4, pp. 102–27.

deliberately disregarded, the hermeneutic conventions applicable to a particular technical discourse or *material subiecta*²¹ — outside the world of the University at a time of burgeoning ideological conflict and lay intellectual ambition, and the vernacular writings supporting and fostering these.²²

The second point to be noted about the Fleming affair relates to Arundel's somewhat intemperate letter. It evidently forms part of the Archbishop's sustained efforts to negotiate a far more intrusive role for his office in the internal affairs of Oxford: he takes pains to emphasize that the enterprise of guarding against Wycliffite heresies within the University through the Committee of twelve is part of his archiepiscopal jurisdiction and a matter of his authority, not that of Congregation.²³ But the tone and vocabulary of the letter are more ambiguous in their implications. Arundel does invoke the lexis of inquisitorial enquiry: there are three references to the alleged *pertinacia* or obstinacy of Fleming & co. Pertinacity was a part of the strict legal definition of heresy, a heretic — in an important Augustinian formulation, later enshrined in the *Decretum* — being 'a person who voluntarily persists in a position contrary to the faith'.²⁴ Furthermore, as William Courtenay has pointed out, fourteenth-century theology students in Oxford and Paris routinely took an oath 'immediately before entering upon the reading of the *Sentences* and immediately before inception [...] not to argue questionable theses *pertinaciter* or *assertive* but only *disputabile* (that is, for reasons of academic discussion)'.²⁵ Yet the many rhetorical references to the youthful rashness and presumption of Fleming and those like him — they are beardless and inarticulate boys; they do not know how to spell; they need the schoolmaster's rod — seem paradoxically to acknowledge that applying the categories and terms of inquisitorial enquiry into heresy and/or the prosecution of false teaching is inappropriate in a pedagogic context of training in theological argumentation in which different, intramural, modes

²¹ On this subject, see Kaluza, 'Les Sciences et leurs langages'.

²² Gerson would cite Gregory approvingly: 'For Gregory's [dictum] is to be respected: let the discourse of the learned be shaped by the mores of the listeners' ('Observandum est enim illud Gregorii: iuxta mores auditorum formetur sermo doctorum'). See Gerson, *De duplici logica*, ed. by Glorieux, p. 62.

²³ But for a discussion of the ambiguous authority of this committee, apparently deriving from both the archbishopric and the Congregation of Oxford University, see Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, pp. 224, 229–30.

²⁴ Putallaz, 'Censorship', p. 106; Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy*, pp. 14–16; Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics*, p. 192; Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, pp. 5–7.

²⁵ Courtenay, 'Inquiry and Inquisition: Academic Freedom', p. 178.

of control and censure would be appropriate — indeed, Courtenay calls such intramural censure a ‘frequent housekeeping event in the last stages of many academic careers’.²⁶ (One could argue that this is precisely the point made by the Committee: they had not, they clarified, brought any accusation against Fleming but had instead condemned, for his own good, one of his Wycliffite propositions as false according to the common sense of words.)

The entire Fleming episode — which seems to have been resolved amicably, since Fleming went on to have a most distinguished career as a pillar of the Church, and as one of the foremost anti-Wycliffite castigators, founding Lincoln College, Oxford in 1427 specifically as an anti-heretical institution²⁷ — bears witness to the rapidly changing circumstances of university life and academic freedom in late medieval England. The traditional academic privilege of relatively free speculation and debate within the enabling constraints of the discursive conventions and procedures of the medieval university came to constitute an increasingly contentious field of negotiation between various religio-political structures laying claim to authority: in this case, between the Congregation of the University of Oxford and the Archbishop’s office via his nominated Committee. Fleming himself seems to have been unwilling to be censured by Arundel’s committee, firstly because this was, strictly speaking, extramural censure — from a special anti-Wycliffite inquisitorial Committee reporting directly to the Archbishop — and not part of the normal intramural processes of academic correction and control; and also because such censure, whatever its source, was coming to assume quite different valences in a religio-intellectual environment increasingly obsessed with the question of ‘orthodox’ or ‘heterodox’ *identity* rather than with the truth or falsehood of *ideas*, even within the university milieu.²⁸

²⁶ Courtenay, ‘Inquiry and Inquisition: Academic Freedom’, p. 178.

²⁷ He also sat on the Committee which drew up the list of two hundred and sixty-seven errors and heresies collected from Wyclif’s works, and he had Wyclif’s bones exhumed in 1428: see Swanson, ‘Flemming, Richard (d. 1431)’. For the foundation of Lincoln, see Cobban, ‘Colleges and Halls 1380–1500’, p. 600; I have discussed the subject at greater length in Ghosh, ‘University-Learning, Theological Method and Heresy’, pp. 289–313.

²⁸ As Luca Bianchi and William Courtenay have documented for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, while ideas were condemned and books burnt, the condemnation to the stake or otherwise of members of the powerful university corporations was rare. Lists of condemned or suspect propositions would be drawn up which would have a certain kind of authority and ideally lead to what Bianchi calls the ‘autocensure’ of scholars and their reliance on various get-out clauses in the case of conflict with authority: *recitando*, *inquirendo*, *movendo dubitationes*, *gratia disputationis*, *exercitii causa*, and so on. See Bianchi, *Censure et liberté intellectuelle*

The nebulous grey area that had always existed between the academic examination and censure of ideas (or books) and the heretication of persons is also the site in which the 1410 Vienna trial of Jerome of Prague, friend and associate of Jan Hus and devotee of John Wyclif, may be located. Jerome's trial for heresy was organized under the auspices of the bishopric of Passau with a prosecuting tribunal comprising both *sacre pagine professores* and *iuris canonici doctores* of the University of Vienna, among them such heavyweights as Nicholas of Dinkelsbühl and Peter of Pulkau.²⁹ The records of Jerome's trial are ambiguous in their implications and a variety of readings of its purpose and form has been proposed. Two main readings deserve to be noted: 1) that the impetus for the trial came from disgruntled Viennese scholars who were formerly members of Prague University and who wished to take revenge on Jerome for the 1409 Decree of Kuttenberg (Kutná Hora), thought to be engineered by him and Hus, which gave the Bohemian nation at the university three votes out of four and thereby emasculated the Germans and forced them to emigrate to Vienna;³⁰ and 2) that the trial was part of the sensitive and increasingly politicized confrontation of realist philosophers and their opponents that was fundamentally reshaping the Middle European intellectual landscape.

At his trial, Jerome was asked to respond to the forty-five Wycliffite propositions which had been famously condemned in Prague in 1403 and 1408 (and which included the twenty-four propositions condemned at Blackfriars in London in 1382).³¹ In addition, he and the witnesses were questioned on twenty-two articles specifically relating to his beliefs, assertions, and deeds, and the 'publica vox et fama' allegedly attached to some of these.³² These articles

à l'Université de Paris, pp. 64–67; Courtenay, 'Inquiry and Inquisition: Academic Freedom', p. 180. Larsen points to the emphasis on ideas rather than on the person who maintained them as a chief distinction between academic and popular heresy proceedings: Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, p. 11.

²⁹ The most recent authoritative edition of Jerome of Prague is *Quaestiones, polemica, epistulae*, ed. by Šmahel and Silagi, with an extensive introduction; the Vienna trial is discussed on pp. lii–lxii. The trial records are edited in Klicman, *Processus iudicarius contra Jeronimum de Praga*. Also see Klicman, 'Der Wiener Process gegen Hieronymus von Prag'; Strnad, 'Die Zeugen im wiener Prozess gegen Hieronymus von Prag'.

³⁰ This is in part the view of Klicman, 'Der Wiener Process gegen Hieronymus von Prag', p. 453; also see Seibt, *Hussitica*, p. 81.

³¹ For details, see Šmahel, *Die Hussitische Revolution*, II, pp. 796–97 (1403); 814–16 (1408).

³² On the importance of *fama* in heresy prosecutions, see Forrest, *The Detection of Heresy*, pp. 198–206; on *fama* in the academic context, see Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, p. 15.

included Jerome's alleged assertion that Wyclif was *doctor evangelicus* who had attained salvation, that there were 'formally and really' distinct ideas in the divine mind ('quod in mente divina plures essent formalitates formaliter et realiter distincte'), that he had preached against clerical status and liberty in Hungary, that he had commended the learning and wisdom of various persons, including Hus, who were vehemently suspect of heresy, that he believed that Wyclif's thought was more to be revered than that of St Augustine, and that he had sown discord between the nations at Prague University despite his oath to the contrary.³³ Commenting on the trial in the context of his work on the history of the *Wegestreit* in the fifteenth-century, Franz Ehrle said that the records offer 'a confused jumble of undigested theological and philosophical propositions and a strong, unhealthy inclination to exaggerate philosophical differences into a struggle between heresy and faith, and to create an intellectual-spiritual environment in which a putative martyrdom for logical realism was no longer impossible'.³⁴ Looking at the proceedings through a different lens, Reginald Betts described the Vienna trial 'as an example of an examination for heresy in a court which was a curious mixture of an archbishop's consistory and a university court of discipline'.³⁵

We may begin by considering those aspects of the trial which seem to bear affinities to intramural processes of academic censure, with at least cursory attention paid to philosophical content as well as to questions of procedure. One of the witnesses, Conrad of Hildesheim, formerly of Prague and Heidelberg, referred to Jerome's 1406 disputation at Heidelberg, in the course of which the latter allegedly asserted that 'beyond the distinction of persons in the divine mind, there were [present] certain ideas really distinct'.³⁶ Conrad was then asked whether Jerome posited this thesis 'in posizione vel alias' ('as a basic premise or otherwise') to which Conrad replied that he could not recall whether the thesis was proffered as a position or had been conceded 'vi

³³ Klicman, *Processus iudicarius contra Jeronimum de Praga*, pp. 5, 9–10.

³⁴ '[...] ein wirres Gemengsel von unverdauten theologischen und philosophischen Sätzen und eine starke, ungesunde Neigung, die philosophischen Lehrdifferenzen zu Kämpfen der Häresie mit dem Glauben aufzubauchen und eine Geistesatmosphäre zu schaffen, in der ein vermeintliches Martyrium für den logischen Realismus nicht mehr unmöglich war': Ehrle, *Der Sentenzenkommentar Peters von Candia*, pp. 120–21.

³⁵ Betts, 'Jerome of Prague'.

³⁶ Klicman, *Processus iudicarius contra Jeronimum de Praga*, p. 14: 'quod ultra distinctionem personarum in mente divina essent quedam formalitates realiter distincte'.

argumentorum' (lit. 'by the force of the arguments').³⁷ This would seem to indicate a clear interest in details of scholastic procedure in the context of a formal *disputatio*: the distinction being made here is between one's main thesis, i.e., the initial statement or *positum*/premise, and corollaries which one may be obliged to admit in the course of debate, perhaps to sustain a formal logical consistency.³⁸ Indeed, there is a handful of such references to such procedural detail: Johannes of Voburg, a Prague graduate and another witness, is asked whether Jerome held the thesis concerning real universals in the mind of God 'tamquam argumentum vel tamquam verum' ('as it were in argument or as a truth'),³⁹ for a declarative sentence might be part of an inference (if A, then B) and be used argumentatively, *disputative*, without being asserted or being considered as true. There is also the occasional question inquiring *how* Jerome arrived ('quomodo deduxerit')⁴⁰ at the thesis concerning real universals.⁴¹

Conrad of Hildesheim further goes on to assert that Jerome described Marsilius of Inghen and others as 'heretics in logic and philosophy in that they did not hold to real universals':⁴² note here the curious conflation of 'heresy', a theological category, with logical and philosophical debate.⁴³ In response to the article alleging that Jerome considered Wyclif greater than Augustine, Nicholas Tell, also formerly of Heidelberg, seems to corroborate Conrad's claim. In the

³⁷ Klicman, *Processus iudicarius contra Jeronimum de Praga*, p. 14.

³⁸ See De Rijk, 'Specific Tools Concerning Logical Education', esp. pp. 71–73.

³⁹ Klicman, *Processus iudicarius contra Jeronimum de Praga*, p. 20

⁴⁰ Klicman, *Processus iudicarius contra Jeronimum de Praga*, p. 32

⁴¹ Note that Jerome himself would later point out, when examined on his former Parisian teaching on the subject of universals by Gerson at the Council of Constance, that whatever he had asserted in the course of his disputations at Paris had been asserted as a philosopher: 'et quae ego posui Parisiis in scholis publicis [...] posui *philosophice*' (italics mine); see Kaluza, 'Le Chancelier Gerson et Jérôme de Prague', pp. 82–83; also Herold, 'Der Streit zwischen Hieronymus von Prag und Johann Gerson', pp. 84–85.

⁴² Klicman, *Processus iudicarius contra Jeronimum de Praga*, p. 15: 'hereticos in loica et philosophia ex eo, quia non tenerent universalia realia'.

⁴³ This is in sharp contrast to the tradition of thought, such as articulated by Ockham in his *Dialogus*, that 'assertiones pure philosophicae, quae ad theologiam non pertinent', fall outside the province of dogmatic interdiction: for discussion, see Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, pp. 260–67; see also Maarten Hoenen's comments on the *Wegestreit*: 'heresy is a theological category. Only theological views can be heretical. The *Wegestreit*, however, was related to the educational programme of the Arts Faculty. The debate was about methods of reading the corpus aristotelicum [...]. Yet the sources reveal a different picture'; Hoenen, '*Via antiqua* and *via moderna*', p. 22.

course of defending the *universalia communia realia*, Jerome, he says, 'judged Masters Ockham, Maulfeld, Buridan, Marsilius, and their followers to be not dialecticians but diabolical heretics'.⁴⁴ Another witness, Henry of Aura, a Prague graduate, adds further colour when he quotes Jerome's address to students assembled at the controversial 1409 quodlibetic disputation at Prague of Matthew of Knín.⁴⁵ Jerome is alleged to have described the vanquished opponents of Matthew as *dialecticos hereticos* whom the students must guard against:

O beloved children, may you not let your masters, [those] heretical dialecticians, lead you astray; may you [instead] come to me and my masters, who will teach you true knowledge divinely imparted.⁴⁶

Though this was something of a topos, the immediate reference may have been to Wyclif's *De veritate sacre scripture*, where Wyclif invokes Anselm's *Epistola de incarnatione verbi* as authority for describing those who deny universals as *dialectice heretici*: 'negantes talia universalia sunt dialecticae heretici'.⁴⁷

However, these aspects of the trial, which suggest an interest in what appear to be intensifying *Wegestreit* controversies, are not the whole story. The depositions also provide us with several colourful accounts of Jerome's flaunting of a letter apparently carrying the seal of Oxford University declaring Wyclif to be a good and catholic man,⁴⁸ denunciations of his oath-breaking in sowing dissension in the University of Prague in the course of bringing about the Kuttenberg decree, and accounts of his controversial doings in Hungary. There are several references to Jerome's crowd-pulling abilities: when Nicholas Czungel, an Austrian priest, is asked about those present at Jerome's reading of the letter from Oxford, he replies: 'masters, doctors and laity, municipal officials and very

⁴⁴ Klicman, *Processus iudicarius contra Jeronimum de Praga*, p. 13: 'intulerit magistros Okkan, Maulveld, Biridanum, Marsilium et eorum sequaces fuisse non dialecticos, sed diabolice hereticos'.

⁴⁵ For this disputation, see Kaminsky, *A History of the Hussite Revolution*, pp. 61–62.

⁴⁶ Klicman, *Processus iudicarius contra Jeronimum de Praga*, p. 33: 'O dilectissimi pueri, non [*sic*] dimittatis vos seducere magistros vestros dialeticos hereticos: veniatis ad me et ad magistros meos, qui vos veram scienciam divinitus infusam informabunt'.

⁴⁷ Wyclif, *De veritate sacrae scripture*, ed. by Buddensieg, I (1905), p. 169. I am much indebted to Maarten Hoenen for drawing my attention to this passage in a lecture on 'Anselm, Wyclif and the Late Medieval *Wegestreit*', delivered at a workshop on 'Logica Augustini: John Wyclif's Realist Logic and its Legacy', Freiburg-im-Breisgau, April 2010.

⁴⁸ This is the letter associated with Peter Payne which survives in a Bohemian copy: see Hudson, 'From Oxford to Prague: the Writings of John Wyclif', p. 642.

many armed squires/knights and such a multitude, that no one could enter the lectorium'.⁴⁹ Similar comments are found in the deposition of Caspar Weinstein.⁵⁰

How ought one to interpret the evidence of Jerome's trial? It would be overly simplistic to see this concerted effort on the part of the bishopric of Passau and members of the University of Vienna as merely the result of personal animosities on the part of German scholars formerly of Prague towards one of the main players in the Kuttenberg negotiations. It is also difficult to read this chapter as belonging solely to the developing history of the *Wegestreit*,⁵¹ at least in terms of the received understanding of the *Wegestreit* as a conflict between schools of thought and philosophical method.⁵² Though philosophical ideas are indeed invoked, and the deponents occasionally refer in passing to propositions made by Jerome *scolastice* in the course of disputations at Paris and Heidelberg,⁵³ they seem to be used more as polemical counters without being examined in any detail, certainly not in the kind of detail that one would expect of a serious intramural enquiry into false teaching. Some of the references to the theory of universals or the Eucharist are cursory to the point of parody: Caspar Weinstein claims that he heard Jerome preach 'that the bread was not with the body of Christ, and that there was one universal ass and suchlike'.⁵⁴ This is the kind of material that one would expect in a heresy trial of unlearned suspects outside the university-world, where travesties of complex philosophical positions do occur.⁵⁵ No doubt Jerome realized the nature of the Vienna examination soon enough, as the curious brevity of his responses seems to suggest; it is then not

⁴⁹ Klicman, *Processus iudicarius contra Jeronimum de Praga*, p. 22: 'magistris, doctoribus et laicis, scabinis civitatis et armigeris armatis quampluribus et tanta multitudine, quod nullus potuit intrare lectorium'.

⁵⁰ Klicman, *Processus iudicarius contra Jeronimum de Praga*, p. 28

⁵¹ Though see Walsh, 'Vom Wegestreit zur Häresie'.

⁵² Though for a powerful alternative reading, see Hoenen, 'Nominalismus als universitäre Spekulationskontrolle'.

⁵³ Jerome had made explosively controversial contributions to debates at both these universities; see Kaluza, 'Le Chancelier Gerson et Jérôme de Prague', pp. 103–04; Šmahel, 'Mag. Hieronymus von Prag und die Heidelberger Universität'.

⁵⁴ Klicman, *Processus iudicarius contra Jeronimum de Praga*, p. 29: 'panem non esse cum corpore Christi, et esse unum commune asinum et similia'.

⁵⁵ Note here that Sackville, in her comments on depositions from heresy trials in thirteenth-century France, points out that inquisitors' interest in error is not investigative: 'where any detail of error appears it is as part of an interrogation based on *fama* and not as part of a theological examination': Sackville, *Heresy and Heretics*, p. 132.

surprising that he decided to flee before the outcome had been decided, and further to write a mocking letter to the prosecutor.

What the trial record suggests is instead the changing valence of academic speculative thought at a time when such speculation was increasingly implicated in extramural, often vernacular, controversy across a range of European cultures. Michael Shank's comment: 'For 1419, the acts of the [Viennese] Faculty of theology read like a litany of heresy accusations, interrupted now and then by records of academic events', may be applicable to more than just Vienna in our period.⁵⁶ The causes of this development may be assumed to be large and complex: the idiosyncratic scholastic method of Wyclif (in its sustained fusion of rigorous philosophy and extreme polemics); its radical, soon-to-be revolutionary, Bohemian afterlife; the growing international political role of academia in the era of the papal schism and the Councils of Constance (1414–18) and Basel (1431–49); burgeoning vernacular literacy accompanied by a huge expansion in the range of written materials available to an informed and enquiring laity; and, finally, what Rudolf Schüssler in his work on post-Schism moral uncertainty has called 'the epistemological shock' provided by the Great Western Schism.⁵⁷ What I am interested in here is instead the question of the impact on the very *raison d'être* of intellectual enterprise of such an environment in which complex questions of logic, hermeneutics, and academic method — especially as these dealt with theology and biblical studies and their associated structures of authority — began to be implicated in what I have elsewhere called a 'deregulated economy' of popular, topical, increasingly vernacular debate of immediate socio-political import, an economy with participants from within, without, and on the threshold of the university.⁵⁸ Such debate was often relatively lacking in philosophical rigour, without clearly articulated, generic conventions of style and signification, and occurring outside the inherited institutional forms and procedures within which the speculative *agon* of medieval academia had traditionally been played out. Furthermore, this burgeoning liminal or extra-mural world of debate seems to have begun to affect the university-world itself. As Maarten Hoenen has explicated, a certain simplificatory pusillanimity seems to make itself felt in fifteenth-century academic life. He points to the predilection in late medieval theology for

⁵⁶ Shank, '*Unless You Believe, You Shall Not Understand*', p. 188.

⁵⁷ Schüssler, 'Jean Gerson, Moral Certainty and the Renaissance of Ancient Scepticism', p. 457.

⁵⁸ See Ghosh, 'Wycliffite "Affiliations"', p. 30.

'encyclopaedic eclecticism', with theologians less interested in finding new solutions or new methodologies, and more concerned to stay within the limits of *communis opinio*. He also points out that 'official documents of the *Wegestreit* seldom give information about the doctrinal arguments of the various parties involved. Only brief statements are reported [...]. Opponents are discredited not through philosophical arguments but through the claim that they defend condemned propositions'.⁵⁹

This is already evident in our period in the Council of Constance's examination and condemnation to the stake of Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague for heresy. The impact on late medieval academia of the Council's innovative decision to condemn as heretics, and burn, on the most elite and international of stages, two members of the powerful corporation of the medieval Czech university needs further detailed research. Hus and Jerome seem to have believed that they would be given the opportunity to explicate and defend their views in Constance in public debate and counter-debate in the manner of the university *disputatio*; the assembled ecclesiasts were on the contrary keen only on forcing Hus to accept the authority of the Council in the determination of dogma and correct interpretation, and on making an example of him if he were intransigent.⁶⁰ Jürgen Miethke has pointed out that Constance witnessed the breaking-down of the barriers between the treatment of academic and popular heresy, in that the conciliar hierarchy was emphatically not willing to enter into theological debates on points of interpretation with the accused masters in the manner of intra-mural censure as was standard in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.⁶¹ It is worth bearing in mind here the very different framework — both intellectual and procedural — within which the academic examination

⁵⁹ Hoenen, '*Via antiqua* and *via moderna*', pp. 19, 30.

⁶⁰ Hus was apparently under the impression that he would be defending his ideas *more scholastico* in front of the whole Council: for a detailed discussion of his trial, see Kejř, *Die Causa Johannes Hus*, pp. 131–84 (p. 169), 190–92; also Rychterová, 'Die Verbrennung von Johannes Hus'. On debates surrounding the exact locus of dogmatic authority in the fourteenth century, see Courtenay, 'Inquiry and Inquisition: Academic Freedom'; Taber, Jr., 'Pierre d'Ailly and the Teaching Authority of the Theologian'; Moule, 'Corporate Theory, Canon Law and the Censure of Academic Heresy'; Courtenay in particular brings out well the extent to which the papal court and theology faculties would play Box and Cox when it came to judging cases of academic censure. On jurisdictional matters specific to Oxford, see Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, pp. 232–53.

⁶¹ Miethke, 'Die Prozesse in Konstanz gegen Jan Hus und Hieronymus von Prag', p. 165. I have discussed this issue at greater length in Ghosh, 'Wyclif, Arundel, and the Long Fifteenth Century'.

and censure of ideas would take place. In particular, we may recall Thijssen's account of the 'complicated hermeneutical game' that judges and defendants would engage in, as well as the working distinction that theologians would make in this context between 'manifest and explicit heresies and so-called implicit heresies, that is, heresies that are still being discussed by biblical scholars'.⁶² Larsen in addition emphasizes the procedural importance of the *protestatio praemissa* or the *revocatio conditionalis*, which 'granted the scholar a presumption of non-pertinacity' if he should be accused of asserting a dubious proposition.⁶³ What we witness in fifteenth-century controversy, located on the interface between academia and an extra-mural 'public' sphere, is instead a very different positioning, and anxiety about the implications, of academic discourses and methods. Forms of doubt, questioning and analysis which had historically been accommodated through conventions of speaking *scolastice*, *disputative*, *sine assertione*, and so on (as opposed to *assertive*, *determinative*, *doctrinaliter*) began to assume an entirely new kind of sceptical valence — a scepticism encompassing biblical hermeneutics, sacramental theology, and ecclesiology — when the arena of debate underwent a significant expansion, and when important public intellectuals such as Wyclif or Hus liberated themselves from what Bianchi has described as 'un réflexe d'autocensure' in medieval university thinkers.⁶⁴ The basic problematic may therefore be formulated as follows: how ought 'faith' to engage with a free attitude of debate and questioning at a time when such intellectuality was no longer the prerogative of the world of the university, with its discursive assumptions and procedural conventions? In England, Archbishop Arundel responded to this unprecedented situation — in the Eighth Constitution — by in effect seeking to nullify academic freedom through rendering void the protection traditionally offered by the *protestatio*, and by attempting to make it much easier for scholars to be condemned as heretics purely on the basis of 'ill-sounding' propositions.⁶⁵ The Council Fathers at Constance seem to have

⁶² Thijssen, *Censure and Heresy at the University of Paris*, pp. 30–31, 110.

⁶³ Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Bianchi, *Censure et liberté intellectuelle à l'Université de Paris*, p. 67. Wyclif and Hus were enabled to do so, at least in part, because of significant political patronage (though this is not to underestimate the strength that both men appear to have derived from an absolute conviction of the rightness of their cause). In contrast, most of Wyclif's Oxford supporters did recant and submit to the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury: see Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, pp. 177–209.

⁶⁵ See Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, pp. 270–72.

taken the process much further in their sensational multiplicity of judicial executions of controversial and high-profile university-men for heresy, men who had joined the Council on the understanding that they would be engaging in philosophical, theological and ecclesiological debate. What such evidence suggests is that the interface between the various domains of late medieval academia and the wider world of religious practice, observance and dissent emerged in this period as an increasingly productive site of 'heresy'. Fifteenth-century Europe thus witnesses a growing tendency to align, almost as a form of knee-jerk reaction, ever-larger swathes of the intellectual-analytic examination of the premises and superstructures of institutionalized religion with 'heresy', signalling what Courtenay has called 'an abrupt and tragic change in attitude to academic freedom that emerged in the early decades of the fifteenth century'.⁶⁶ To put it more provocatively, the late medieval discourse of 'heresy' increasingly became a way of negotiating the scepticism always latent in the astonishing, even bizarre, scholastic enterprise of the logical examination of God,⁶⁷ the end-point, one might suggest, of that particular strain of medieval Christian anti-intellectualism which had led a mid-fourteenth century Oxford friar to describe his university, to its high displeasure, as a *gymnasium haereticorum*.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Courtenay, 'Inquiry and Inquisition: Academic Freedom', p. 181.

⁶⁷ What Alain Boureau has described as the 'essential and fleeting phenomenon of medieval history: the radical intellectualisation of the world under the effects of Christianity': Boureau, 'Intellectuals in the Middle Ages'.

⁶⁸ Oxford insisted on a full recantation of this opinion: see Larsen, *The School of Heretics*, p. 104, n. 48.

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LAUGHTER AND DECEPTION: HOLCOT AND CHAUCER REMAIN CHEERFUL

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Attitudes towards the uncertainty of knowledge shifted within late medieval intellectual circles, particularly in England. The idea that the world might be deceptive, that deception might even be the basic reality of people's lives, encroached upon the medieval imagination and underwent debate and exploration. Within the scholastic context, this concern took the form of a major fourteenth-century debate about whether God could or did tell falsehoods. Beyond the venue of the universities, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* provide a particularly rich context for exploring the dimensions of the world's deceptive possibilities and for trying to discern late medieval strategies for living with them. Two of Chaucer's tales, the Clerk's and the Nun's Priest's, each connect with the academic world of the schools. The interplay between the tales and the scholastic context will serve as a focus for what follows.

In the fourteenth century, the necessities that had entered into scholastic cosmology in the attempt to assimilate the texts of Aristotle and his Arabic commentators during the thirteenth century gave way before the critique of 1277 and its aftermath. Arguably the most significant change was the shift to thinking of the world at its most fundamental as completely contingent, dependent on the contingent will of God. Where in Thomas Aquinas's view contingency had emerged only at the level of some secondary causes, close to the ground of our experience, John Duns Scotus argued that contingency characterized the highest level of divine willing. The created world came into being through God's completely contingent act in such a way that everything

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could be other than it is. Indeed, for Scotus, the effects of God's creation remained contingent even in the present time. Everything in the world can, not just could, be other than it is. In England, his arguments set the frame for theology.¹ The ramifying implications of a contingent order required the scholastics who succeeded Scotus to grapple with a number of new questions. While most did not accept his views about the contingency of the present, the question of future contingents presented almost as much difficulty. For example, William Ockham, like his contemporaries, did not accept Scotus on the contingency of the present, but Ockham did accept Scotus's critique of the traditional Boethian/Thomist perspectival view that God sees all events, whether past, present, or future, from the perspective of his atemporal eternity and, therefore, only as present existents. Scotus's critique led Ockham to argue that God's knowledge of events must track their temporal unfolding. Thus, just as the future is open to multiple possibilities for human beings, so it remains open to multiple possibilities for God's contingent understanding as well.²

A covenantal view of God's causal relationship with the world was a better fit with the new focus on contingency. In England, the covenantal view largely replaced the more mechanistic causal operation of the four Aristotelian causes.³ In covenantal theology, God freely establishes a series of covenants or agreements with human beings that sets the conditions for salvation. By contrast, in Thomas Aquinas's theology God serves as the final cause that draws each person to the preordained good.⁴ Aquinas, and Matthew of Aquasparta after him, each identified God's final causality with his providence.⁵ For them, the moral order of the world was grounded in its cosmological mechanics. But when Ockham finished discussing the Aristotelian causes, only efficient causality kept its recognizable form.⁶ The role that Aquinas and Aquasparta had assigned to God's final causality as the organizing force for the moral universe

¹ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, pp. 123–38.

² William Ockham, *Tractatus de predestinatione*, ed. by Boehner and others, pp. 507–09, ll. 18–23; p. 509, ll. 59–67. Also see Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, pp. 160–61, and 222–66, for late medieval discussions of future contingents.

³ Gelber, 'Providence'.

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, ed. by Gilby and O'Brien, pars prima, q. 19, art. 8 (v, pp. 34–39).

⁵ Gelber, 'Providence', pp. 764–67.

⁶ William Ockham, *Quodlibeta*, ed. by Wey, II. q. 1. IV. q. 1 and IV. q. 2 (pp. 106–11, 293–309). Also see Gelber, 'Providence', pp. 768–69.

would no longer serve. If theologians turned to God's efficient causality to serve the same providential function, a move that Thomas Bradwardine would ultimately make, they risked plunging the world into moral determinism.⁷ To avoid such determinism, they set aside reliance on God's causal power as the framework for morality and put divine and human acquiescence in a mutually enacted covenantal agreement in its place. Within the covenantal system, human acts in themselves have no intrinsic worth meriting grace or salvation. However, God has promised that he will not deny human beings increments of grace if they do their best to fulfil his commands. Because no intrinsic necessity connects human actions to salvation, God is free to require any set of compatible injunctions amenable to human fulfilment. There is nothing about human deeds (including the sacraments) that requires God to accept them as meritorious. Yet God has of his contingent free will agreed under the covenant to accept them.⁸ The change from the Old Law to the New Law was viewed as an instance of God bringing about a change in the ordained order that exemplifies such divine freedom.⁹

A covenantal system, as an instance of God's *potentia ordinata*, is vulnerable, however, because the contingent nature of the world means that God has the absolute power, his *potentia absoluta*, to make it be otherwise than it is. The covenants themselves are contingent. Depending on them requires depending upon God's word and that raises the difficult question, what if God could mislead, deceive or even lie? As I have argued elsewhere:

The very contingency of the ordained system that requires a covenant to guarantee God's consistent relationship with the *viator*, might undermine the possibility of covenant by casting doubt on the reliability of promises. The structure of God's *potentia ordinata* calls itself into question.¹⁰

The work of those like Heiko Oberman and William Courtenay who, by stressing the protections of covenant, have done so much to counteract critics of late medieval theology whose blanket indictment condemned the late scholastics for dissolving all certainty in the corrosive acid of God's absolute power, stands under question again from another source.¹¹ Robert Holcot set forth the

⁷ Gelber, 'Providence', pp. 771–72.

⁸ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, pp. 191–92.

⁹ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, pp. 310–24.

¹⁰ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, p. 200.

¹¹ Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*; Courtenay, *Covenant and Causality in*

difficulty quite clearly in relation to God's knowledge of future contingents. If God's knowledge of the future retained its contingency:

God could not make any man certain about any future contingent, nor could any man believe with certainty or have hope for what God promises without being deceived — because howsoever much God might assert that something would happen in the future, even after his assertion or promise, God could still make the opposite happen since, notwithstanding God's revelation or promise, what he promised would remain as contingent after his revelation or promise as before.¹²

The potential for deception gave rise to an extended debate at Oxford. Ockham and his student Adam Wodeham, as well as the secular theologian Richard FitzRalph, argued that while God could from his absolute omnipotent power intend that those to whom he communicated believe what was said, and that what was said be false, that God would not do this within the ordained system.¹³ FitzRalph further argued that if God could intend that someone believe a false communication, that God would convey such a falsehood only through an intermediary, never in *propria persona*.¹⁴ However, Robert Holcot recognized that the contingency of God's enactments, combined with his power to do whatever does not include a contradiction, meant that the ordained system did not provide a bulwark against deception. As he wrote:

God can be obliged to no law but that without its observance he can be morally good, because otherwise the divine goodness would depend on creatures, and God would be less good than he is if he were to destroy every creature; and similarly God would begin to be better than he was before the observance of the law. Whence, just as a prince who is above the law can perform some act without sin or evil, which those existing under the law in no way can do without sin, so God

Medieval Thought; Courtenay, Capacity and Volition; Courtenay, Changing Approaches to Fourteenth-Century Thought.

¹² 'Deus non posset certificare hominem de aliquo futuro, nec posset homo certitudinaliter credere vel sperare illud quod Deus promittit nisi deciperetur, quia quantumcumque asseruerit se aliquid esse facturum, potest post assertionem vel promissionem facere oppositum, quia tale dictum, non obstante revelatione vel promissione Dei, manet contingens post dictum vel promissionem sicut ante': Holcot, *In IIII libros sententiarum quaestiones*, II, q. 2, in *Seeing the Future Clearly*, ed. by Streveler and others, p. 122, ll. 471–76. Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, pp. 200–01.

¹³ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, p. 210.

¹⁴ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, pp. 210–11.

in not fulfilling what he promised acts without the evil of falsity or perjury, which someone existing under the law could in no way do.¹⁵

To reinstate a measure of certainty, Holcot relied on the principle of non-contradiction. The one absolute constraint on God's omnipotence provided the fallback for the believer as the one source of ultimate certainty. If God were to set aside the current system and enact some alternative, which it is clearly in God's power to do, God would either inform people of the change, in which case they could comply with the newly revealed system of commands, or he would not inform them. If God were not to inform them of the change, then human beings would be in a situation of invincible ignorance, and it would involve God in a contradiction to hold them accountable for doing or not doing what they have no way of understanding they should or should not do.¹⁶ Even though human beings function within a contingent system of divine commands, their relationship with God remains viable because they can be held accountable only for what they believe in good faith God wants them to do.

By the last decades of the fourteenth century, in the England in which the *Canterbury Tales* is set, the views of Scotus, Ockham and Holcot had become established staples in the schools. Indeed, the problem of uncertainty that lurks in the covenantal system had been further complicated through the heavy critiques of Thomas Bradwardine and John Wyclif, who rejected their predecessors' reliance on covenant and stressed the uncertainties covenantal views introduced into the human relationship with God.¹⁷ The schools constituted a contested ground. If the theologians arguing amongst themselves provided no firm place to stand, then confronting the reality of having no firm place to stand was precisely the issue. *The Canterbury Tales* are brilliantly situated to do just that.

¹⁵ 'Deus autem nulli lege potest esse obnoxius quin sine eius observatione potest esse bonus moraliter, quia sic divina bonitas dependeret a creatura, et Deus foret minus bonus quam est, si destrueret omnem creaturam; et similiter secundum hoc Deus inciperet esse melior quam fuit ante legis observationem. Unde, sicut princeps qui est supra legem potest aliquem actum facere sine peccato vel malitia quem existens sub lege nullo modo potest facere sine peccato, ita Deus non perficiendo quod promisit, facit sine malitia falsitatis vel periurii, quod tamen existens sub lege nullo modo posset facere': Holcot, *Quodlibet*, III, q. 8, in *Seeing the Future Clearly*, ed. by Streveler and others, p. 103, ll. 537–46. Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, p. 337.

¹⁶ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, p. 338.

¹⁷ Gelber, 'Providence', pp. 771–72; Lahey, *John Wyclif*, pp. 32–64, 102–34. Also see Denery II, 'From Sacred Mystery to Divine Deception'.

Chaucer has one of the most complex narratorial voices in all of literature.¹⁸ The pilgrim named Chaucer is not Chaucer the subtle master-poet. The subsidiary narrators, the tellers of each of the tales, tell a tale that tells tales on the tellers themselves, and, in juxtaposition with the other tales and tellers of tales, tell tales on the other tale-tellers as well. Moreover, as a collection of tales with previous tellers, each tale imports at least implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, the ghostly narrators of previous tellings. Finally, even within the tales, various characters may serve in turn as narrators of further anecdotes. In throwing all of these narratorial balls into the air, Chaucer deftly juggles, but leaves no determinate place within the structure of the collection from which to interpret what is intended. Chaucer positions his readers in indeterminacy, thrown back on their own judgement. In this they find themselves like the pilgrims on the journey. The metaphor of pilgrimage for the condition of each of us in this life, as *viatores* on a penitential journey towards our ultimate judgement, encompasses both readers and tale-tellers alike.

Chaucer's wayfarers and presumed readers all suffer from the inherited 'wounds' of sin that are the lot of everyone in the post-lapsarian world. Aquinas identified four: ignorance, weakness, concupiscence and malice.¹⁹ These wounds serve as the starting point of any assessment. Each of the pilgrims in his or her own way needs to be on penitential pilgrimage — indeed if there is one constraining reality it is just that — and each finds him or herself on this metaphorical road with these faults in varying and observable measure. Precisely because of their burdens, none of the pilgrims offers a voice of authority that the reader can trust, and by implication, neither does Chaucer the poet.

Chaucer's literary strategies rely on multiple forms of allegory taken in its broadest sense as Isidore of Seville defined it for medieval writers: to say one thing in words but to mean something else.²⁰ The very structure of literary creation has the potential to mirror the uncertainties of late medieval culture. This could be a moment for despair. But deception of all kinds is also central to humour, and Chaucer instead chooses to exploit the multiplicity

¹⁸ Mann, 'Characterization and Moral Judgement', a reprinted and expanded selection from Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire*.

¹⁹ McAlpine, 'The Triumph of Fiction in the Nun's Priest's Tale', p. 87, points out the relevance of this for the Nun's Priest's Tale. Also see Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, pp. 121–26, for various late medieval views on the matter.

²⁰ Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 287–88, citing Isidore, *Etymologiae*, I. 37. 22.

of deceptions to full comic effect.²¹ The twists and turns, the surprises, the multiple forms of ineptitude that result, display the human condition as a complex comedy. Moreover, Chaucer's tales work as humour only if his readers get the jokes. Chaucer's ideal reader may live under uncertainty, but a capacity for discernment must also exist somewhere inside that reader enabling him or her to make out the comedy Chaucer puts on display. I will argue that it is that capacity for discernment that provides a small measure of comfort against the ambiguities of the pilgrim's state.

How Chaucerian misdirection plays itself out to embroil the reader in uncertainty is on full evidence in the Clerk's Tale. The Clerk himself, of 'Oxenford', a long time student of logic, who would

Levere have at his beddes heed
Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed,
Of Aristotle and his philosophie²²

stands as the representative of the university community. The tale he tells about Griselda (Grisilde), which he says he heard directly from Petrarch in Padua before the poet laureate died (Clerk's Prologue IV. 26–38), has many versions. Chaucer relied on Petrarch's Latin translation of Boccaccio's tale, on an anonymous French version, and perhaps even on Boccaccio's original version of the story itself.²³ The art lies in Chaucer's careful choosing of his narrator, in the small changes he introduces and in the discussion afterwards by the Clerk and what is called in some of the manuscripts the 'Lenvoy de Chaucer'.²⁴ For all the apparent simplicity, the slipperiness of Chaucer's tale is evident in the multiplicity of interpretations his modern critics have put on offer. To sample a few: David Steinmetz has analysed elements of the tale itself in light of the covenantal views at Oxford.²⁵ In contrast, Joseph Grossi has highlighted what he believes to be the Clerk's 'universalizing, allegorist and authoritarian

²¹ Ruggiers, 'A Vocabulary for Chaucerian Comedy', p. 51.

²² Prologue IV. 293–95. All citations are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson and others.

²³ Finlayson, 'Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*'. Also see Morse, 'The Exemplary Griselda'; Johnson, 'Reincarnations of Griselda'; Farrell, 'The Griselda Story in Italy'; Clarke, *Chaucer and Italian Textuality*, pp. 129–36, 152–62.

²⁴ Farrell, 'The "Envoy de Chaucer" and the *Clerk's Tale*', and Clarke, *Chaucer and Italian Textuality*, pp. 159–62.

²⁵ Steinmetz, 'Late Medieval Nominalism and the *Clerk's Tale*'.

Realism'.²⁶ Lee Patterson has linked Chaucer's telling to the marriage negotiations surrounding Richard II's marriage to Isabelle of France and to a critique of Richard's cultivation of the idea of sacral kingship.²⁷ A number of other interpreters have focused in on Griselda herself as a figure of complicated interest to and for women readers.²⁸ By choosing a perspective from which to analyse the tale, whether that of Chaucer the author, of the Clerk, of the Clerk's tale itself, or of Griselda (a character in a tale of many versions), each of these modern interpreters picks a stand-point from which to launch a commentary. Yet the multiplicity of possible perspectives is as much a counter to creating a definitive reading for us as for Chaucer's medieval audience.²⁹

The instability is particularly acute when one looks at the deceptive Walter. In the basic story, the Marquis Walter —

to speke as of lynage,
The gentilleste yborn of Lumbardye,
A fair persone, and strong, and yong of age,
And ful of honour and of curteisye;
Discret ynogh his contree for to gye,
Save in somme thinges that he was to blame (IV. 72–76)

— promises his people that he will take a wife. But he says he will chose her freely as his heart is set, regardless of her family or estate if they will promise to honour her 'as she an emperoures doghter weere' (IV. 168). Right from the beginning, Walter is presented as an ideal young ruler and yet as blameworthy in some unnamed way. He is also shown making agreements with his people, but only out of his own freedom, which he emphasizes he will keep. He is a ruler in the covenantal tradition exercising the power and the freedom of his estate.

Among the poorest of the poor in a village near Walter's court, a man had a daughter, Grisilde:

²⁶ Grossi, 'The Clerk vs the Wife of Bath', p. 148.

²⁷ Patterson, 'The Necessity of History'.

²⁸ For example: Morse, 'The Exemplary Griselda'; Johnson, 'Reincarnations of Griselda'; Ashton, 'Patient Mimesis: Griselda and the *Clerk's Tale*'; Klein, "Ne suffreth nat that men yow doon offence"; Denny-Brown, 'Povre Griselda and the All-Consuming *Archewyves*'.

²⁹ The problem of interpretation poses itself whenever anyone tries to address this text. As Anne Middleton has put it in Middleton, 'The Clerk and his Tale', p. 121: 'the Clerk's tale of Griselda has become in modern times perhaps *The Canterbury Tales*' supreme test of its readers' interpretative powers'. Also see Salter, *Chaucer*, pp. 37–65; Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, pp. 132–55; Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity*, pp. 261–98, and Clarke, *Chaucer and Italian Textuality*, pp. 129–36, 152–62.

to speke of vertuous beautee,
 Thanne was she oon the faireste under sonne;
 For povrelliche yfostred up was she,
 No likerous lust was thurgh hire herte yronne (IV. 211–14).

Walter, discerning Grisilde's virtue, decides to choose her as his wife, and in his approach to her and to her father, he asks her with 'good herte' to do everything that he desires, as he thinks best, and never to grumble about it nor say 'nay', either by word or frowning countenance (IV. 351–56). Grisilde says that she is unworthy of this honour,

But as ye wole youreself, right so wol I.
 And heere I swere that nevere willingly
 In werk ne thoght, I nil yow disobeye,
 For to be deed, though me were looth to deye (IV. 361–64).

Thus the marriage involves another agreement or covenant, and not just the usual promise of obedience to her husband, but one of complete conformity of will on Grisilde's part to the will of her husband Walter, even if he were to want her dead.

After they have been married a while and Grisilde has given birth to a daughter, Walter decides that even though Grisilde has given him no cause to doubt her, he will 'tempte' his wife to see if she will be truly steadfast in her promise. The term injects a diabolical element, compromising Walter's choice, even though he might be thought to serve a divine purpose in testing Grisilde. The Clerk underscores the problem with Walter's action, interjecting a cautionary note into his story at this point, saying he sees no need for Walter to have tried her in this way:

That yvel it sit
 To assaye a wyf whan that it is no nede,
 And putten hire in anguyssh and in drede (IV. 460–62).

But Walter, embedded in the tale, presses on with his plan. Most importantly, he lies to Grisilde. He tells her that his subjects are upset at being subject to her and that they are asking him to do away with their daughter. Then he asks Grisilde to consent to his taking the child, reminding her of her oath but saying he will not do it unless she agrees. In line with her oath, Grisilde does assent, and Walter sends a man to take the child away. As Walter's man takes the baby, he gestures as though he would slay it (IV. 535–36):

Grisildis moot al suffer and al consente,
 And as a lamb she sitteth meke and stille,
 And leet this cruuel sergeant doon his wille (IV. 537–39).

When Grisilde has again given birth, this time to a boy, and he has reached the age of two, Walter decides to repeat his test, again much to the Clerk's expressed dismay:

O nedeles was she tempted in assay!
 But wedded men ne knowe no measure
 Whan that they fynde a pacient creature (IV. 621–23).

Again Walter lies to Grisilde, saying that the people are concerned lest peasant blood rule them after Walter is gone, and again Grisilde says:

Ye been oure lord, dooth with youre owene thing
 Right as yow list; axeth no reed at me [...]
 Lefte I my wyl and al my libertee,
 And took youre clothyng. Wherefore I yow preye,
 Dooth your plesaunce; I wol youre lust obeye (IV. 652–53, 656–58).

Even after all of this, still not satisfied, Walter sets still more tests. And again the Clerk interjects his objection:

But now of wommen wolde I axen fayn,
 If thise assayes myghte nat suffise?
 What koude a sturdy housbonde moore devyse
 To preeve hir wyfthod and hir stedefastnesse,
 And he continuyng eevere in sturdinesse?
 But ther been folk of swich condicioun
 That, whan they have a certein purpos take,
 They kannat stynte of hire entencion (IV. 696–703).

In spite of the scandal that spreads among his people, who presume that he has killed his own children, Walter perseveres. When his daughter (brought up secretly in Bologna with his sister) reaches the age of twelve, Walter has papal bulls counterfeited that seem to allow him to set Grisilde aside for another wife (ll. 736–49). He recalls his daughter to his court, and in front of everyone he tells Grisilde that he has permission from the pope to set her aside and wed another. Walter sends Grisilde back to her father. Finally, to grind home the point even further, Walter recalls Grisilde to the court to oversee the preparations for the wedding. Only after Grisilde has fulfilled all of his commands, does Walter relent and reveal that her children are alive and that she has not in fact been set aside after all (IV. 1051–78).

How should one see the execrable Walter? Chaucer inherited the ambiguity from his source, Petrarch. Petrarch viewed this tale as exemplary, explaining to Boccaccio that this story pleased him so much that he wanted to memorize it:

so that I might recall its pleasures as often as I wished and retell it in conversation with my friends, as the opportunity might arise.³⁰

At the end of his version of the tale, Petrarch drew an oblique moral:

I thought it fitting to re-tell this story in a different style [i.e., in Latin], not so much to urge the matrons of our time to imitate the patience of this wife [which seems to me almost unchanging] as to arouse readers to imitate her womanly constancy, so that they might dare to undertake for God what she undertook for her husband. God is the appropriate tester of evils, as the Apostle James said; but he tempts no one himself. Nevertheless he tests us. Often he allows us to be belaboured with heavy stings, not so that he might know our spirit — he knew us before we were created — but so that our fragility might be shown to us by clear and familiar signs. I would have rated among the most steadfast of men one of whatever station who endured without complaint and for God what this little country wife endured for her mortal husband.³¹

Chaucer's Clerk repeats it almost verbatim:

This storie is seyed nat for that wyves sholde
 Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee,
 For it were inportable, though they wolde,
 But for that every wight, in his degree,
 Shoulde be constant in adversitee
 As was Grisilde; therefore Petrak writeth
 This storie, which with heigh stile he enditeth (IV. 1142–49).

³⁰ 'Ut et ipse eam animo quociens velem non sine voluptate repeterem, et amicis ut fit [confabulantibus] renarrarem': Petrarch, *Seniles*, 17. 3, in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Correale and others, I, p. 111; trans. I, p. 110. And see Morse, 'The Exemplary Griselda', pp. 58–59.

³¹ 'Hanc historiam stilo nunc alio retexere visum fuit, non tam ideo, ut matronas nostri temporis ad imitandam huius uxoris pacienciam, que michi vix mutabilis videtur, quam ut legentes ad imitandam saltem femine constanciam excitarem, ut quod hec viro suo prestitit, hoc prae-stare deo nostro audeant, qui licet ut Iacobus ait Apostolus intemptator malorum sit, et ipse neminem temptet: probat tamen. Et sepe nos multis ac gravibus flagellis exerceri sinit, non ut animum nostrum sciat, quem scivit ante quam crearemur. Sed ut nobis nostra fragilitas notis ac domesticis indicii innotescat. Habunde ego constantibus viris ascripserim, quisquis is fuerit, qui pro deo suo sine murmure paciatur quod pro suo mortali coniuge rusticana hec muliercula passa est': Petrarch, *Seniles*, 17. 3, in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Correale and others, I, p. 129; trans. I, p. 128.

He goes on to mention the Apostle James and God's testing of each: 'for oure exercise, | Withsharpe scourges of adversitee' (IV. 1154–57). But then he adds in his own words that God does this, not because he does not know our will:

for certes he,
Er we were born, knew al oure freletee;
And for oure beste is al his governaunce.
Lat us thane lyve in virtuous suffraunce (IV. 1159–62).

Walter occupies an unstable place. Interpreters have recognized that there are at least two readings of Walter. The 'human' view regards him as a flawed husband and a bully. But this view is in tension with the allegorical reading in which Walter serves as an instrument of divine testing.³² The reader is put in a quandary. The Clerk's advice to live in virtuous sufferance because the adversity that comes our way is a test from God makes Walter an instrument of God's 'governance'. Mention of Job in the tale does the same (IV. 932). Petrarch's moral also asks the reader to see God behind the scenes in some wise. But as John Finlayson has pointed out, the Clerk and perhaps 'Chaucer' in the Envoy, re-directs the discussion away from the allegory towards the real women of his time, who not only could not be expected to act like Griselda, but should even resist such husbandly abuse.³³ Lee Patterson's reading of the tale as a protest against Richard II's assertion of royal privilege takes on plausibility in the call for wives to resist: 'the kind of absolutist, ahistorical sacredness that Walter, as well as Richard, seek to stage is not just called into question by the fact of its performance but is permanently unavailable in a world of endless contingency.'³⁴

At many levels, the reader is left with ambiguity. Does the Clerk represent the covenantal theology of the schools and is Walter a figure whom FitzRalph, for example, would recognize as an instrument of divine testing through deception? In his discussion of the question of whether or not God can or does deceive human beings, Robert Holcot went the farthest of his contemporaries, arguing not only that God could deceive us, but, citing the case of God's telling David that he would rebuild the temple, that God has deceived human beings, and for no apparent redeeming good.³⁵ Does the Clerk's choice of Petrarch's tale transform Walter into a caricature of Holcot's deceiving God? Is the decep-

³² Lynch, 'Despoiling Griselda,' pp. 42–43. Also see Salter, *Chaucer*, pp. 59–62.

³³ Finlayson, 'Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*,' pp. 268–73.

³⁴ Patterson, 'The Necessity of History,' p. 203.

³⁵ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, pp. 214–221.

tion that governs the plot of the story a matter of Walter's sin or a condition of human existence? Does Griselda's absolute obedience and conformity of will to Walter present the reader with an example of perfect faithfulness, as Petrarch and the Clerk suggest? Or is she in turn a caricature of late medieval views of divine command ethics, whose failure to object to Walter's demands is in itself a kind of moral failing?³⁶ Do Petrarch, the Clerk and possibly 'Chaucer' in the Envoy undermine the exemplary story with the further observation that Griselda's steadfastness is not in fact imitable, and indeed as the Clerk and the Envoy perhaps suggest, actions like Walter's should be resisted? But on what ground should the reader resist?

The 'uncertain knowledge' of the Clerk's tale also permeates the Nun's Priest's Tale.³⁷ Chauntecleer and Pertelote, those oh-so-knowledgeable barnyard chickens, debate the sources one can use to discern the meaning of dreams. When Chauntecleer first tells Pertelote about a nightmare, Pertelote ridicules him and mentions Cato's advice to give no thought to dreams (VII. 2940–41), but Chauntecleer responds with two tales from 'Oon of the gretteste auc-tours that men rede' (VII. 2984), one about two travellers and a dream of woe (VII. 2985–3062), and another about a dream of danger at sea (VII. 3067–104), from the same book in succeeding chapters (VII. 3064–65). Robert Holcot's *Librum in sapientiae Salomonis*, lectio 103 and lectio 202, each in turn citing Valerius Maximus, appear to be Chauntecleer's source, although the rooster has elaborated the tales and misstated their placement.³⁸ Clearly, the schoolmen are again in the crosshairs. The Nun's Priest also interjects a discussion of divine foreknowledge into the story as a frame for the barnyard doings:

But what that God forwoot moot nedes bee,
After the opinioun of certain clerkis.
Witnesse on hym that any parfit clerk is,
That in scole is greet altercacioun
In this mateere, and greet disputisoun,
And hath been of an hundred thousand men.

³⁶ Peter King has argued that for William Ockham, 'the core of ethics is the love of God (the intrinsically good act), and the love of God is a matter of conforming one's own will to God's will'. See King, 'Ockham's Ethical Theory', p. 237.

³⁷ McAlpine, 'The Triumph of Fiction in the Nun's Priest's Tale', pp. 79–92, has a good discussion of the problems.

³⁸ *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Correale and others, I, 486–89. For the attributions to Valerius Maximus, see Holcot, *In librum sapientiae Regis Salomonis praelectiones* CCXIII, pp. 350, 666.

But I ne kan nat bulte it to the bren *sift it to the bran*³⁹
 As kan the hooly doctour Augustyn,
 Or Boece, or the Bisshop Bradwardyn,
 Wheither that Goddes worthy forwityng
 Streyneth me nedely for to doon a thing —
 ‘Nedely’ clepe I simple necessitee —
 Or elles, if free choys be graunted me
 To do that same thing, or do it noght,
 Though God forwoot it er that I was wroght;
 Or if this wityng streyneth never a deel
 But by necessitee condicioneel.
 I wol nat han to do of swich mateere;
 My tale is of a cok (VII. 3234–42).

Thus the Nun’s Priest brings the contestation in the schools on matters of necessity and contingency directly to the reader’s notice. By juxtaposing it with the ‘tale of a cock’, however, what passes in the schools for learning is brought down to the level of the barnyard. Chaucer’s own interest in a Boethian perspective (he translated the *Consolatio philosophiae* into Middle English), with its emphasis on human free will and on a divine providence that imposes only conditional necessity on human choices, provides reason to believe Chaucer himself would not have sympathized with Bradwardine’s predestinarian views.⁴⁰ However, the Nun’s Priest’s interjection is likely to be the priest’s jab at the Clerk, at university learning in general, and an instance of Chaucer poking fun at himself. As a result, like the Clerk’s tale, the Nun’s Priest’s tale has no clear message. Chauntecleer’s moral:

For he that wynketh, whan he sholde see,
 Al willfully, God lat him nevere thee! (VII. 3431–32)

God never let someone prosper who closes his eyes wilfully when he should see — is answered by the Fox:

but God yeve hym Meschaunce,
 That is so undiscreet of governaunce
 That jangleth whan he sholde holde his pees (VII. 3433–35).

³⁹ Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Kolve and Olson, p. 236, n. 6.

⁴⁰ Chaucer’s translation of Boethius is contained in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Benson and others, pp. 295–469. For a text with a similar debate about foreknowledge, see *Troilus and Criseyde* IV. 956–1082.

God give misfortune to the one so indiscreet as to talk when he should keep his mouth shut. Eyes open, mouth shut. The Nun's Priest adds:

But ye that holden this tale a folye
 As of a fox, or of a cok and hen,
 Taketh the moralite, goode men.
 For Seint Paul seith that al that written is,
 To oure doctrine it is ywrite, ywis;
 Taketh the fruyt, and lat the chaf be stille (VII. 3438–43).

As Paul Ruggiers points out, citing a phrase from Eric Bentley, Chaucer 'banks heavily on the sanity of his audience'; this includes 'their moral sanity as well as their common sense'.⁴¹ While Chaucer provides no place to stand within his text, he presumes in his readers a discerning conscience able to distinguish the *fruyt* from the *chaf*. The examples of hypocrisy, human frailty, and self-deception that run riot through the tales, pose for the reader an occasion for self-reflection as well as amusement. There is a presumption among the late medievals, as well as among earlier ones, that there is in each human being a natural inclination to do the good and to refrain from evil even in our fallen state. Conscience should be the guide in making one's way through the snares and pitfalls of the human condition.⁴² Inevitable ignorance is set over against the covenantal idea of 'facere quod in se est' (doing one's best).⁴³

The Nun's Priest's Tale confronts the modern reader with a rhetorical *tour de force*. Every rhetorical device and genre is present, inviting a reading that sees only rhetorical craft.⁴⁴ But medieval assumptions about the way text enters the mind of auditors in play with memory and moral perception, produced a preoccupation with discernment.⁴⁵ I read Chaucer as a man of his time rather than ours (in which the aesthetics of textual gamesmanship are usually detached from moral considerations).⁴⁶ In sending it all up, Chaucer returns the reader to his or her own capacity for judgement. The position Chaucer seems to pre-

⁴¹ Ruggiers, 'A Vocabulary for Chaucerian Comedy', p. 61. Bentley, *Life of the Drama*, pp. 221–22.

⁴² Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, pp. 65–66.

⁴³ Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology*, pp. 132–34.

⁴⁴ Copeland, 'Chaucer and Rhetoric', p. 138; McAlpine, 'The Triumph of Fiction in the Nun's Priest's Tale', p. 79.

⁴⁵ Largier, 'Mysticism, Modernity, and the Invention of Aesthetic Experience'.

⁴⁶ Largier, 'Mysticism, Modernity, and the Invention of Aesthetic Experience', pp. 54–57. Also see Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages*.

sume for his reader is one in which trying to do our best in a farcically difficult world is what we are asked to do. By keeping a sharp eye turned on the peccadillos of our fellow travellers, and paying attention to the sharp eyes they turn on us as well, we stand a better chance of discerning our own faults and frailties.

If we turn again to Holcot, we see another way of viewing the problem. He met with resistance to his argument that God might deceive people and that invincible ignorance was a defence against uncertainty. He had posed an example:

I pose that Peter, seeing Christ and Jacob, does not know how to distinguish between them, and he judges that Jacob is Christ. Having posed that, Peter then loves Jacob above all; therefore, he delights in him with the delight of fruition.⁴⁷

Holcot argued that even though Peter had violated the article of faith to love God above all, he would have loved Jacob meritoriously in the mistaken belief that Jacob was Christ because invincible ignorance would excuse him from blame. In cases of mistaken identity, Holcot even contended that Peter might adore the devil meritoriously.⁴⁸ Holcot's Franciscan contemporary William of Chitterne criticized his position, arguing that error could not be an excuse where an article of faith was concerned, even if on seeing Christ one could not be sure of what one was seeing. Given the general uncertainty of knowledge, Chitterne argued, no wayfarer ought to delight in anything absolutely, but only conditionally, with the proviso that what appears to be the case, really is what it appears to be and not the devil or someone else in disguise.⁴⁹

Holcot responded with the case of the little old woman. Take the instance of a bishop who preaches about some subtle article of faith, who gets confused and tells his congregation the wrong thing: the little old woman in the back row who is obliged to believe what her bishop tells her, and has no way to know that what he is saying is nonsense, is protected from sin through invincible ignorance.⁵⁰ Holcot objected to Chitterne's proposal to withhold full worship from someone who is believed to be Christ under the condition that it *is* Christ as believed. Holcot argued that the conditional would either diminish the adoration owed to God or it would not prevent worship of the devil or some other

⁴⁷ 'Pono quod Petrus videns Christum et Jacobum nesciat inter eos distinguere, et estimet Jacobum esse Christum. Quo posito, diligat Petrus Jacobum super omnia, igitur fruitur eo': Holcot, *Sent.* I, q. 2, cited in Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, p. 95, note 73. Also pp. 294–95.

⁴⁸ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, p. 296.

⁴⁹ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, p. 298.

⁵⁰ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, p. 299.

imposter. Even though the world is contingent, Holcot insisted that faith should not be conditional. The *viator* must accept God's commands 'as if' they could not be otherwise, even though the contingency of the world means that it is possible that those commands are false or misleading.⁵¹ As I have put it elsewhere:

Even though the world may be a deceptive place, God may tell falsehoods and cases of mistaken identity may arise, nevertheless, those *in via* must hold to their belief that salvation follows from obedience to God and that the world, if a snare and a delusion, is benign for those who do their best.⁵²

In Holcot's view, conscience dictates that Peter, and everyone else, worship the devil if the devil appears in the guise of Christ and in such a way that we cannot tell the difference. As long as the error arises through invincible ignorance, we bear no fault for obeying our consciences. In fact, if we believe that we are in the presence of Christ, we are obliged to adore the one we see. Holcot also rejected the opinion of those who would argue that anyone being deceived was being deceived only because he or she had already fallen into sin, so that the deception was a punishment for that sin. That would, in his view, nullify invincible error as a defence against sin. All error would produce a presumption of sin.⁵³ In general, Holcot argued that people fall into error contrary to the faith at the risk of damnation only if they have an evil will and neglect to do the work to find out whatever they are obliged to know to avoid such error. Those with a good will who persist in willing well will receive what they need to know sufficient for their salvation. Intention and cultivation of a good will are the keys to whether someone sins or not.⁵⁴

It is just possible that Chauntecleer's oblique testimony about Holcot that he was 'oon of the gretteste auctour that men rede' (VII. 2984) may serve as a key to the poet's beliefs. The self-deprecating irony of Chaucer's using a vain little rooster as his mouthpiece would fit quite well with his self-representation in the rest of the poem. Both Chaucer and Holcot in their own ways depict a world in which farce and deception are possible and even common. Nevertheless, Holcot remains good humoured, and one might even argue that recognition of the humour of our situation is evidence for Chaucer of the very discernment necessary for us to carry on. In contingency and laughter there is hope.

⁵¹ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, pp. 299–300.

⁵² Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, p. 300.

⁵³ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, pp. 300–01.

⁵⁴ Gelber, *It Could Have Been Otherwise*, pp. 228, 301–07.

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MEDIEVAL BÊTISE: INTERNAL SENSES AND SECOND SKINS IN RICHARD DE FOURNIVAL'S *BESTIAIRE D'AMOURS*

Sarah Kay

This paper is about a kind of knowledge that comes into being below the level of the rational mind and so cannot qualify as *scientia*; if it can be called knowledge at all, it should probably be reckoned an uncertain form of it. The mental representations with which I shall be concerned result from the processing of data from the external senses by those capacities of the sensible soul which medieval inheritors of Aristotle knew as the 'internal senses' and among which imagination and memory are included. I am interested in the operations of the sensible soul because it was conceived, in this Aristotelian tradition, as the animating principle that human beings share with other animals and thus as being responsible for all the capacities — from locomotion to perception — which we animals have in common and which distinguish us from plants.

The word *bêtise* in my title is used by Derrida to epitomize the knot of contradictions that bedevils reactions to this human-animal overlap. It is taken from his *L'Animal que donc je suis*, an historical critique of philosophy for repeatedly sacrificing the animal in the fruitless cause of attempting to guarantee the human.¹ Meaning 'silliness, stupidity', the word *bêtise* derives from *bête*, literally

¹ Derrida, *L'Animal que donc je suis*, trans. by David Wills as Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*.

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'beast' but familiarly 'silly, stupid', and is used only of human behaviour;² that is, *bêtise* lumps together non-human animals as inferior to human ones, but then re-ascribes their nature to stigmatized humans. Derrida keeps reverting to this term as symptomatic of humans' efforts to identify their exclusivity from other animals, efforts that are at once incoherent and violent. The same self-contradictory logic, Derrida observes, characterizes words like 'bestiality' that are used in a derogatory way only of human beings, reproving people for behaving *like* other animals at the same time as demarcating them *from* them. Richard de Fournival's *Bestiaire d'amours* is, I will argue, broadly answerable to a philosophical framework that positively affirms the commonality between human and other animals as much as it also asserts human distinctiveness, but it does not entirely escape the *bêtise* identified by Derrida.³

Derrida's writings on animals pay scant attention to the Middle Ages. But medievalists can contribute to the growing field of animal studies in a quite unique way in so far as the medieval period is the era of the manuscript book which, until the fourteenth century, is always copied on parchment, a refined form of animal skin. Readers and writers of medieval texts thus find themselves in continued contact with the animal at the very point at which they most distinguish themselves from their own animality: in the high cultural activity of refining, recording, or receiving works of literature. I have argued elsewhere that medieval readers phantasmatically assume the parchment of the codex as their own skin, and thus experience their kinship with the animal kingdom and themselves as animals within it.⁴ Thanks to this simultaneous convergence and differentiation of human and animal, reading becomes caught up in the problematic of *bêtise*. This interpretation may seem fanciful, but in his *Bestiaire d'amours* Richard de Fournival lends it support by the ways in which he writes the reader into the codex.

From a material standpoint, this inscription is effected by means of the manuscripts' visual programmes, and especially of the illustrations that are projected to form a vital part of every copy. Richard exploits the traditional book form of bestiaires, which are never simply texts, but always anticipated as books. Even if Richard did not oversee the manuscripts of his work he clearly intended them

² Wills's translation renders *bêtise* by 'asinanity'.

³ *Le Bestiaire d'amour et la response du bestiaire*, ed. and trans. by Bianciotto. I have also referred to *Li Bestiaires d'amours di Maistre Richart de Fornival e li Response du Bestiaire*, ed. by Segre, as translated by Francesco Zambon in *Bestiari medievali*, ed. by Morini.

⁴ This argument is grounded in a theory of reading based on Dider Anzieu's concept of the Skin-Ego ('le Moi-peau'). See Kay, 'Legible Skins'.

to be illustrated. And from a conceptual standpoint, this presence of the reader in the book results from what I take to be Richard's playful engagement with Aristotelian views of the sensible soul, the categories of which are used to bring together animals' behaviour and that of human lovers. Aristotle's remarks about imaginings, for example, indicate the parameters of Richard's undertaking:

And because imaginations [*φαντασίαις*] remain in the organs of sense and resemble sensations, animals in their actions are largely guided by them, some (i.e., the brutes) because of the nonexistence in them of thought, others (i.e., men) because of the temporary eclipse in them of thought by feeling or disease or sleep.⁵

Which in the *versio antiqua* is rendered:

And because imaginations remain within and resemble the senses, many animals act in function of them. Some because they have no understanding, like beasts. And some because of the veiling of their intellect by some passion, or illness, or sleep, like men.⁶

As is the case for the Philosopher, Richard de Fournival's point seems to be that humans really *are* like other animals, and all the more so when, under the influence of an emotion such as love, they suspend their capacity for rational thought — the *differentia* that makes them *unlike* other animals.

By these means, I propose, the *Bestiaire d'amours* combines self-presentation as a book with a ludic inquiry into the narrator's and his lady's place in the animal kingdom.⁷ The more Richard places human lovers in the same psychological *Umwelt* as the animals, the more he, his lady, and their readers are invited to slip, as it were, into the animals' skins, and so into the pages of the book on which the text is copied. Only the inevitable tangle of *bêtise* in his endeavour preserves the delicious dimension of disguise or fancy dress — the knowledge that these skins are not so securely ours as not to be reckoned second skins.

⁵ Aristotle, *De anima*, III. iii, 429a 5–8; the Greek text of Aristotle is quoted in translation from *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Barnes, p. 682.

⁶ 'Et quoniam [phantasiæ] immanent, et similes sunt sensibus, multa secundum ipsas operantur animalia. Alia quidem, quia non habent intellectum, ut bestię. Alia vero ex velamento intellectus, aliquando passione, aut ægritudine, aut somne, ut homines.' Thomas Aquinas, *In Aristotelis librum de anima commentarium*, ed. by Pirotta, p. 221. (All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.)

⁷ This interpretation differs, then, from feminist censure of Richard for reducing his lady to the level of the animal. See Solterer, *The Master and Minerva*, pp. 79–94, esp. p. 82; and Beer, *Beasts of Love*, passim, e.g., p. 15; though for Beer it is the whole love experience that Richard, by animalizing it, condemns: see p. 62.

The Bestiaire d'amours and the Bestiary Tradition

A brief introduction will make it easier to grasp Richard's boldness in thus turning a traditional, religious genre into a playful thought-experiment in which natural philosophy and dark humour combine. Bestiaries are Latin semi-learned texts that were among the earliest to be adapted into the vernacular.⁸ Philippe de Thaun's *Bestiaire*, dating from the first decades of the twelfth century, is one of the oldest compositions in Anglo-Norman French.⁹ It was followed in the early thirteenth century by three more texts that, if anything, adhere more closely to the aims and format of their Latin models.¹⁰ Two of them (those of Gervaise and Guillaume le Clerc) resemble Philippe's in being insular or Anglo-Norman and in verse while the third (previously known as the 'short version' of Pierre de Beauvais) is in Continental French prose.¹¹ These four vernacular bestiaries all predate the *Bestiaire d'amours*, usually assigned to somewhere approaching the middle of the thirteenth century (c. 1225–50).¹² Shortly after its composition, an anonymous author drew on it in order to revise and expand Pierre de Beauvais's *Bestiaire*, adopting some fifteen beasts and modifying the description of several

⁸ McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries*; Baxter, *Bestiaries and their Users*; *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, ed. by Clark.

⁹ The most recent edition of Philippe de Thaun is in *Bestiari medievali*, ed. by Morini. She dates it to between 1121 and 1135 (p. 105).

¹⁰ As McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries*, p. 45 has shown, all these vernacular bestiaries are adaptations of the first Latin bestiary family in which the original Physiologus material was combined with Book XII (*De animalibus*) of Isidore's *Etymologies*.

¹¹ See *Bestiari medievali*, ed. by Morini, for the most recent text of Gervaise, who might be identified with a Gervasius active at the Cistercian monastery of Barbery near Caen (p. 289 and note 1). Guillaume le Clerc de Normandie's much more ambitious bestiary dates to 1210 or 1211. The standard edition remains that of Robert Reinsch (*Das Thierbuch des normannischen Dichters Guillaume le Clerc*, ed. by Reinsch). Our understanding of Pierre de Beauvais's bestiary has been revolutionized by Craig Baker's edition (*Le Bestiaire*, ed. by Baker). Baker shows that only the so-called short version, edited by Guy Mermier (*Le Bestiaire de Pierre de Beauvais, version courte*, ed. by Mermier), is actually by Pierre de Beauvais and that it was composed between 1206 and 1212 (or at the latest 1218) (*Le Bestiaire*, ed. by Baker, pp. 17–18); this overturns Mermier's conclusion that the long version was the earlier one which Pierre subsequently shortened.

¹² In his edition of the *Bestiaire d'amours* Bianciotto ascribes it to the second quarter of the thirteenth century (p. 8). Earlier scholars, unaware of Craig Baker's arguments, tend to place it later. Beer, *Beasts of Love*, gives 'the middle decade of the thirteenth century' (p. 3) and Morini reproduces Segre's dating of the middle of the thirteenth century, perhaps 1252 (*Bestiari medievali*, ed. by Morini, p. 366).

others in accordance with Richard de Fournival's indications.¹³ The *Bestiaire d'amours* is thus firmly anchored in a vernacular tradition as well as a Latin one, a tradition which — despite undoubted variations between individual texts and general modifications in content over time¹⁴ — had fairly clear outlines.

Like their Latin models, the French bestiaries ascribe 'natures' to the animals they enumerate, the term designating at once a behaviour on the part of the animal and its potential significance, or allegoresis, in Christian doctrine. Some natures represent the work of incarnation and redemption (like the pelican resuscitating its young with its own blood, as Jesus did for us). Another group of natures alerts us to the snares of the devil (the fox or the hedgehog, for instance), and a third kind to the fallen, sinful character of humanity (like the hoopoe, which honours its aged parents more than humans do). The doctrinal and pastoral meaning performed by the bestiary animals, even if unbeknownst to themselves, gives them a status akin to that of the Bible, quotations from which regularly adorn the allegoreses. This privilege is especially clear in the chapter on elephants which compares their chaste copulation with that of Adam and Eve before the fall, a comparison found in Phillipe de Thaun, Guillaume le Clerc, and Pierre de Beauvais. Philippe de Thaun, for example, writes:

The elephant is a beast gifted with understanding and that rarely produces offspring. When the time comes for it to do so, it heads east taking its female with it, as far as Paradise where man was first set.¹⁵

He glosses:

An animal that governs itself in such a way signifies Eve and Adam who were set in the holy, earthly Paradise, where the serpent entered that first tempted them.¹⁶

¹³ *Le Bestiaire*, ed. by Baker, pp. 27–28. He dates the long version to between 1246 and 1268 (p. 30). Baker's conclusion that the *Bestiaire d'amours* influenced the long version ascribed to Pierre de Beauvais and not *vice versa* weakens Beer's contention in *Beasts of Love* that Richard's text is a response to Pierre de Beauvais. It also affects the dating of the *Bestiaire d'amours*.

¹⁴ The scholars who have done the most to distinguish the variety among bestiary versions and their manuscripts are Baxter, *Bestiaries and their Users*, and *A Medieval Book of Beasts*, ed. by Clark.

¹⁵ 'Ele est beste entendable, | nen suvent foünable; | e quant cel tens vendrat | que elle foünerat, | dunc vait en orïent, | sa famele od sai prent, | tresque al paraïs | u hume fud primes mis': *Bestiari medievali*, ed. by Morini, ll. 1419–26.

¹⁶ 'Bestes de tel baillie | Eve et Adam signefie | ki el saint paraïs | terrestre furent mis, | u li serpent entrat | ki primes les temptat': *Bestiari medievali*, ed. by Morini, ll. 1453–58.

Emphasizing the point, the illustrator of Philippe's text in Oxford, Merton College, MS 249, juxtaposes elephants warding off the devilish dragon with Adam and Eve succumbing to the devil's temptation: see Figure 5. This chapter reminds us that the act of naming the animals, to which all the bestiaries refer and which is emphasized by Isidore, precedes original sin.¹⁷ The animal names that are glossed in these texts go back to a state of innocence, which explains why the meanings associated with them are more often positive than not. Animals are so many wondrous links with a lost Eden, and they can help to compensate us humans for the ignorance of divine intentions into which we were plunged when we were expelled from it. Humans may have dominion over other animals, but we also need to be edified and instructed by them. The animals unwittingly participate in revelations that can be regarded as 'certain', even though bestiaries are not an intellectually learned or ambitious form.

In his *Bestiaire d'amours* Richard preserves the generally positive valuation of the animals and even promotes some of them, such as the monkey to which I return later, from the diabolical camp where they traditionally belong to a position of equality with human beings. But he skilfully transforms the understanding of an animal's nature, phasing out the religious semiotics of traditional bestiary chapters and replacing them with interpretations that are much more secular and somatic. His use of the elephant is a case in point: its traditional mistrust of the dragon appears, almost at the end of the *Bestiaire d'amours* as Richard is winding up for his final plea, as a model of how a courtly lady should eschew the false pleading of low seducers (§ 34, ll. 36–52). This reversal of the elephant from an exemplum of holy chastity to one of erotic discrimination is typical of Richard's wit and audacity. He consistently flattens the venerable two-tier structure of allegory in favour of psychological similitude between animals and lovers: an approach clearly gratifying to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century audiences, since not only is this the work by Richard that met with the greatest success, it is also, of all the French-language bestiaries, the one with the largest number of manuscripts;¹⁸ it additionally gave rise to translations into several languages, and to two further texts, a rhymed *Bestiaire d'amours* and a response allegedly by its female addressee.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Derrida, *L'Animal que donc je suis*, pp. 34–35.

¹⁸ There are twenty-two complete widely diffused manuscripts, including several copied in Italy; see Lucken, 'Les Manuscrits du *Bestiaire d'amours*', and the Introduction to *Le Bestiaire d'amour et la response du bestiaire*, ed. and trans. by Bianciotto, pp. 37–41.

¹⁹ See the Introduction to *Le Bestiaire d'amour et la response du bestiaire*, ed. and trans. by Bianciotto, pp. 69–101, and Beer, *Beasts of Love*, pp. 149–69 and 189–90.

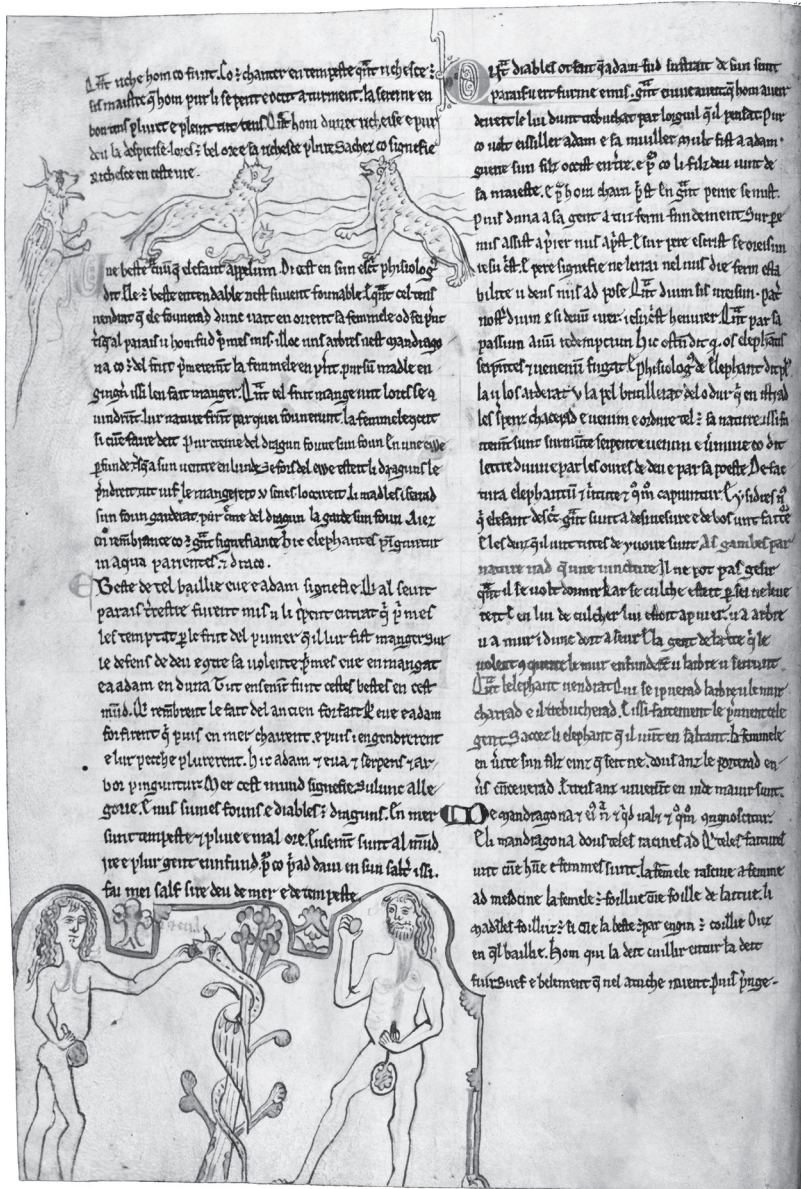


Figure 5. Philippe de Thaun, *Bestiaire*. Oxford, Merton College, MS 249, fol. 6^v.

At the top of the column the unlikely looking female elephant (centre) gives birth, menaced by a dragon (left) and guarded by the also implausibly depicted male elephant (right). At the bottom of the column, this paradise is lost when Adam and Eve take the apple from the serpent.

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As its title suggests, the *Bestiaire d'amours* proceeds in the first instance by combining the form of the bestiary with love poetry; it could be seen as the first example of prose poetry in French. Richard explains that he is abandoning verse for prose in a last-ditch attempt to win his lady (§ 2). Composing the bestiary is, he says, his *arrière-garde* (military reserve), his very last recourse; in honour of this passage, some manuscripts title the work 'arrière garde' rather than 'bestiaire d'amours'. But despite this turn to the prose bestiary, the work retains the essential themes and progression of the courtly *grand chant*, a genre in which Richard was himself an accomplished practitioner.²⁰ It progresses through a series of stanza-like movements: first the first person complains of being on the point of death as a result of love and the way it overwhelms him; then he laments his lady's unresponsiveness and considers means of punishing her; but he recants his vengeful thoughts and instead casts around for her lady's *merci*. The *Bestiaire d'amours* thereby continues the fashion for incorporating bestiary imagery into the love lyric that was inaugurated by twelfth-century troubadours and taken up in the North by Thibaut de Champagne.²¹ But Richard's adoption of the prose medium and chapter format of the conventional bestiary enables him to tie himself, the lady, and love into a web of resemblances with other animals and their natures far more systematically than is the case with these antecedent lyrics. The result is a richly comic work in which theology is evacuated in favour of Love; and the failure of lovers, his own especially, is mapped through often unflattering comparisons with animal behaviours. The work emerges as being about lovers' *bêtise*: a state which makes them sometimes similar to other animals (in good ways and bad) and sometimes less successful than those other animals are.

It is this reflection on nature which, in turn, enables the rapprochement of both the traditional bestiary and the lyric with natural philosophy, a discipline in which Richard, who was a doctor, surgeon, and man of science, was also extremely knowledgeable. As we know from his *Biblionomia*, a work he composed detailing one hundred and sixty-two books in his possession, his personal library contained a large section on philosophy that included Aristotle's *De anima* and *Metaphysics* and Avicenna's treatises with the same titles among its contents.²² (The actual manuscript of Avicenna's *De anima* that

²⁰ *L'Œuvre lyrique de Richard de Fournival*, ed. by Lepage.

²¹ Beer, *Beasts of Love*, p. 8, suggests that Richard may also be following the outline of Ovid's *Ars amatoria*.

²² Delisle, 'La *Biblionomie* de Richard de Fournival'. Aristotle's *De anima* is no. 61 in

Richard commissioned and owned is now in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.)²³ The two works on the soul seem particularly pertinent to the direction in which Richard takes his reflections on the inner senses and will be a major guide in what follows.

Aristotelian Orientations

A scientific and Aristotelian orientation to the *Bestiaire d'amours* is established from its opening line. Richard's prologue has been much discussed by other scholars, but I start here too in order to identify the text's philosophical stakes. Richard's opening words baldly translate the opening line of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, 'All men by nature desire to know'²⁴ — the earliest quotation into French of what was later to become a commonplace. Delivered in this way without any attribution, and in the context of the bestiary tradition where explicating a creature's 'nature' is the central concern, Aristotle's definition assumes its full value as a statement of comparative biology. Already in *Metaphysics* the sentence leads straight into a comparison between the capacities of men and those of animals:

All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. [...]

By nature animals are born with the faculty of sensation, and from sensation memory is produced in some of them, though not in others. And therefore the former are more intelligent and apt at learning than those which cannot remember; those which are incapable of hearing sounds are intelligent though they cannot be

Delisle's transcription, along with others of Aristotle's works of natural philosophy. Avicenna's *De anima* is no. 64 and his *Metaphysics* is included in no. 70. Nos 71 and 72 are made up of three translations of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in what Richard terms the old translation, the new translation, and the translation of Gerard of Cremona. The *Biblionomia* has most recently been published together with a facsimile reproduction of the manuscript in *La 'Biblionomia' de Richard de Fournival du manuscrit 636 de la Sorbonne*, ed. by de Vleeschauwer.

²³ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 16603; see Rouse, 'Manuscripts Belonging to Richard de Fournival', p. 264; the manuscript is described in *Avicenna Latinus*, ed. by van Riet, II, pp. 228–29.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I. 1, 980a 22 (*The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Barnes, p. 1552); 'Toutes gens desirrent par nature a savoir', *Bestiaire d'amours*, § 1, l. 1.

taught, e.g. the bee, and any other race of animals that may be like it; and those which besides memory have this sense of hearing can be taught.

The animals other than man live by appearances [φαντασῖαις] and memories and have little of connected experience; but the human race lives also by art and reasonings.²⁵

In the medieval *versio antiqua* the passage reads:

All men naturally desire to know. A sign of this is the delight we take in the sense; for apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves, and most of all the sense that operates through the eyes. [...]. Animals by nature, then, are born with sensory power. Now in some animals memory arises from the senses but in others it does not; and for this reason the former are prudent and more capable of being taught than those which are unable to remember. Those which cannot hear sounds are prudent but unable to learn, as the bee and any other similar type of animal there may be. But any which have this sense together with memory are able to learn. Thus other animals live by imagination and memory and share little in experience, whereas the human race lives by art and reasoning.²⁶

Since Richard does not name Aristotle, the quotation is dissimulated; but the allusion is not limited to the quoted words alone, as witness the many points of contact between the passage just quoted and the development of § 1 of the *Bestiaire d'amours*. Thus Richard follows Aristotle in working from the desire for knowledge to the processes of sensation and perception which precede (or underlie) the operations of reason. His nature drives man to seek out knowledge, says Richard. However, not only is the totality of knowledge shared out among many individuals, but many of those who possessed knowledge lived in earlier times and unless what they know can be transmitted to future generations it risks being lost. The way to transmit knowledge is through memory.

²⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I. 1, 980a 22–980b 27 (*The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Barnes, p. 1552)

²⁶ 'Homines natura scire desiderant. Signum autem est sensuum dilectio. Praeter enim utilitatem, propter seipsos diliguntur, et maxime aliorum, qui est per oculos. [...]. Animalia quidem igitur natura sensum habentia fiunt. Ex sensibus autem quibusdam quidem ipsorum memoria non fit, quibusdam vero fit. Et propter hoc alia quidem prudentia sunt, alia vero disciplinabiliora non possibilibus memorari. Prudentia quidem sunt sine addiscere, quaecumque sonos audire non potentia sunt, ut apes, et utique si aliquod aliud huiusmodi est animalium genus. Addiscunt autem quaecumque cum memoria et hunc habent sensum. Alia quidem igitur imaginationibus et memoriis vivunt, experiment autem parum participant; hominum autem genus arte et rationibus.' Thomas Aquinas, *In metaphysicam Aristotelis commentaria*, ed. by Cathala, p. 3. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. by Rowan, p. 1.

Memory, Richard continues, has two doorways, seeing and hearing; and two media, painting and speech. By these means, he says, memories are created and knowledge is preserved. For example, he says:

When one sees painted a history whether of Troy or something else, one sees the deeds of heroes past as if they were present. And so it is with speech, for when one hears a romance read, one hears the deeds of heroes as if they were present [...] by which it is apparent that one can attain memory by means of these two things.²⁷

Richard appears to say that books, especially illuminated books, preserve the memory of things past. But can he really be saying this? A bibliophile and the owner of a substantial library, could Richard have believed that readers derive sound knowledge of the Trojan War from the images painted in a manuscript, or that an audience would acquire a reliable knowledge of history from hearing a romance recited? He must surely have possessed the sophistication to know that illuminators and *trouvères* do not transmit their own lived experiences but construct images in their readers' minds. They may give their readers the impression of attaining memories, but what is actually remembered are the texts and images created by the *trouvères* and illuminators themselves. Such memories, far from preserving information about Troy or other historical events, are entirely factitious. Indeed, the careless sequencing of 'Troy', 'something else', and 'romance', conjoined with the twice repeated 'as if they were present', shows him to be concerned less with past events than with current impressions. He is reminding his readers that we are powerfully affected by the representations in books and he admits openly that his purpose in writing is to leave an unforgettable impact on his lady (§ 1, ll. 35–9). From the specifically human knowledge of his opening sentence he has worked down the cognitive ladder to reach those places in the mind where representations (*φαντασμάς*) are received and stored, and which is common to humans and other animals.

At this point his bestiary launches into the animal comparisons which provide the ground for his idiosyncratic courtship. And the movement away from rational knowledge to sensation continues as Richard likens his unsuccessful pleas to the cries of a cockerel despairing of the dawn, or of a braying ass (§ 3). This first animal chapter humorously travesties the traditional opening of bestiaries, turning the cock (which often features as a minor element in the initial

²⁷ 'Quant on voit painte une estoire ou de Troie ou d'autre, on voit les fais des preudommes qui cha en arriere furent aussi con s'ils fussent present. Et tout aussi est il de parole, car quant on ot .i. roumans lire, on entent les fais des preudommes aussi con s'il fussent present [...] dont apert il bien que par ches .ii. choses puet on a memoire venir' (*Bestiaire d'amours*, § 1, ll. 22–30).

chapter on the lion) from a diabolical messenger into a literal failed singer like the narrator himself, and moving the wild ass into poll position from its usual site halfway through the bestiary, again transforming it from a diabolical signifier into an image of his own shortcomings.²⁸ Such abrupt changes of place and function underline Richard's turn from theology to sensory perception, and his abandonment of all pretence at human privilege. Voice, we learn, is intimately connected with sight, as witness the example of the wolf encountering a man (§ 4; Fig. 6). If the wolf sees the man first the man loses his voice, but if the man sees the wolf first the wolf loses all its strength. Richard goes on to explain that a lady's nature is like the wolf's, for if she shows her love for a man before he reveals his love for her, that is if he 'sees' her love first, she is totally disarmed; but if the lover is the first to express his love so that she can 'see' it, he loses his capacity to speak to her. This interaction of sight and sound, whereby hearing is a form of seeing and seeing affects the capacity to speak, also invokes the inward senses, perhaps especially the 'common sense' (see below). The text has turned its back on rational or doctrinal understanding to explore the imprint on our mind of the pure phenomenon.

Richard's guides to this realm of perception are no longer the *Metaphysics* but the *De anima*, the *Treatise on the Soul*, of Aristotle himself and its subsequent elaboration by Avicenna.²⁹ These treatises, which were studied and commented on with minute attention in the first half of the thirteenth century, both concentrate on sensation as that aspect of *anima*, or soul, which *animates* every *animal*.³⁰ Having refused to accord to the beasts, even the highest among them, the capacity to know rationally, Aristotle is obliged to give a definition of sensation that includes a cognitive dimension. Otherwise, how explain that animals can calculate distances, identify their mates or their prey, learn commands, and dream? Between the data assembled within each of the five senses and the activities of the intellect there is a gaping hole that needs to be bridged.³¹ Aristotle sets about doing so in the first three chapters of Book III of

²⁸ The onager or wild ass is no. 21 in both Philippe de Thaun and Guillaume le Clerc, and in their most closely related Latin sources, according to McCulloch, *Mediaeval Latin and French Bestiaries*, pp. 53–54, 61.

²⁹ Avicenna's *De anima* (*al-Nafs*) originally formed the sixth book of his encyclopedic work *Kitab al-Shifā'*. I have also consulted Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology*.

³⁰ Lenzi, *Anima, forma e sostanza*; Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De Anima' in the Latin West*. A helpful but more distant overview is Harvey, *The Inward Wits*.

³¹ Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*, e.g., pp. 12–20; Perler, 'Why is the Sheep Afraid of the Wolf?', pp. 32–52.



Figure 6. Richard de Fournival, *Bestiaire d'amours*. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 459, fol. 3^r. The risk to a wolf when a man sees it before it sees the man, and how it is the same when a man sees a woman, or vice versa.

Reproduced by permission of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

De anima, but in a way commentators agree is confusing; Avicenna tackles the same problem more systematically in Book IV of his own *De anima/al-Nafs* (and more succinctly in his short treatise *Kitāb al-Najāt*).

Aristotle's first recourse is to what Avicenna will later call 'the common sense': the capacity to note such sensibles as distance and proportion that require some articulation of data, and also the capacity to coordinate more than one kind of sense data simultaneously, for example to be able to tell, of a mouse, that it is small and furry, or of a drink that it is white and sweet. This common sense is not just common *between* the senses, it is also common to humans and animals. The co-ordinations which it effects lead to memory and judgement of a kind animals are capable of: in the cases of the small furry animal or the white sweet liquid, there is some sense in which a cat can recognize of a mouse that it is a mouse, and of cream that it is cream. Another movement that arises out of this, though precisely how is not clear, is the passage from sensation to perception: the fact, for instance, that seeing involves being aware of seeing. Daniel Heller-Roazen contends that this manner of understanding perception occupies, in antique and medieval thought, the role of what we would now refer to as 'consciousness' which therefore would be more closely associated, in these periods, with sensation than with thought.³² In this sense, then, animals too would be conscious.

A crucial component for Aristotle in this zone between the senses and the intellect is the mental capacity or event which he calls φαντασία, a term translated in the Middle Ages as *imaginatio*, and that modern translators of Aristotle render with 'imagination', 'apparition/appearance', or 'sensible representation'.³³ Such appearances or representations are the imprint on the mind of the data from the external senses which make possible the operations of the common sense, feature in dreams, enable the formation of memories, and lead in man to conceptual thought since, as Aristotle repeats, without the support of sense impressions we would be unable to think.³⁴ For Avicenna, what Aristotle describes as capacities or events are assigned to mental faculties each seated in

³² Heller-Roazen, *The Inner Touch*, especially pp. 47–55.

³³ Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*, p. 19; Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle*, p. 43: 'imagination seems to be the minimal structure required for an entity to be capable of acts involving [re]presentation of objects'. This view of Aristotle's concept of imagination is combatted by Malcolm Schofield, who instead insists that Aristotle refers to the capacity for invention (as in 'creative imagination'); see Schofield, 'Aristotle on the Imagination'.

³⁴ Aristotle, *De anima*, III. 7, 431a 15–19 (*The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Barnes, p. 685). Aristotle, *On Memory*, 1. 450a 1 (p. 715).

its own part of the brain, and the activities Aristotle associates with φαντασία are more clearly differentiated between faculties that make, warehouse, and deploy representations.³⁵ Unlike Aristotle, Avicenna distinguishes between the operations of imagination in man and in animals, allowing a cogitative function to humans alone. An innovation on Avicenna's part that seems particularly relevant to the *Bestiaire d'amours* is his concept of the estimative faculty, an inward sense common to humans and animals and which has the capacity to discern what, in the Latin translation, are called *intentiones* in the objects of perception. Avicenna's examples of *intentiones* result either in aversion (for example, the sheep, when it perceives the wolf, knows it must flee) or attraction (the sight of a child evokes tenderness in the beholder).³⁶ Hasse proposes rendering the original term in Arabic by 'connotational attribute' rather than 'intention', and clarifies that it refers to an attribute perceived in the object, not a state of mind in the perceiver; this acceptance, he contends, would have been quite accessible to Avicenna's Latin translators.³⁷

The concept of *intentio* is helpful for understanding how Richard modifies the hermeneutics of traditional bestiaries, transforming glosses *in malo* and *in bono* into suggestions that we ought to be drawn toward, or averted from, the behaviours of our fellow animals — and equally, how they are drawn toward, or

³⁵ Avicenna, *De anima*, IV. 1, 60–78, distinguishes between *imaginatio* and the *virtus imaginativa*. The first is closely akin to the *sensus communis* in its capacity to house images whereas the act of compounding and dividing images belongs to the imaginative function, or to the cogitative one in man (see *Avicenna Latinus*, ed. by van Riet, II, pp. 5–6).

³⁶ *Differentia autem inter apprehendere formam et apprehendere intentionem est haec: quod forma est illa quam apprehendit sensus interior et sensus exterior simul, sed sensus exterior primo apprehendit eam et postea reddit eam sensui interiori, sicut cum ovis apprehendit formam lupi, scilicet figuram eius et affectionem et colorem, sed sensus exterior ovis primo apprehendit eam et deinde sensus interior; intentio autem est id quod apprehendit anima de sensibili, quamvis non prius apprehendat illus sensus exterior, sicut ovis apprehendit intentionem quam habet de lupo, quae scilicet est quare debeat eum timere et fugere, quamvis non hoc apprehendat sensus ullo modo* (Avicenna, *De anima*, I. 5, 93–106; *Avicenna Latinus*, ed. by van Riet, I, p. 86). (The difference between apprehending a form and apprehending an *intentio* is this. Form is what is apprehended both by the external and internal sense, but the external sense apprehends it first and then passes it to the internal sense, as when a sheep recognizes the form of a wolf, that is to say its shape and its disposition and its colour, but the sheep's external sense perceives it first and then the internal sense; but *intentio* is what the mind perceives sensibly, but does not first apprehend with the external senses, as when a sheep apprehends the intention it has with respect to the wolf, which is that it should fear it and flee it, which is in no way conveyed by the [external] sense.)

³⁷ Hasse, *Avicenna's 'De Anima' in the Latin West*, pp. 128–136.

averted from, human beings. The reciprocal gaze provokes particularly strong reactions in some chapters of the *Bestiaire d'amours*, like the example of the wolf in § 4 mentioned above: the effect on a wolf of being seen first by a man is as harmful as the effect on a man of being seen first by a wolf. This parity of response is brought out by the balancing images of this chapter's *mise-en-page* in New York, Pierpont Morgan Library MS M 459 (Figure 6). An exchange of looks also affects the behaviour of the lion (§ 12, ll. 8–17) : as long as it is not looked at by a man it will continue peacefully to eat its prey, but when it sees that a man is looking at it, the lion will be filled with shame and rush to attack him. Similar examples involving the viper and the monkey will be discussed below.

Thus the whole network of similitude that subtends the *Bestiaire d'amours* depends on a movement that starts in the senses and gives rise to sensible representations (*φαντασίαις*) that enable the sensate creature to perceive, discriminate between, and act upon, the imprints on its sense organs. This web of comparison is conjured through such phrases as 'and do not be surprised if I have compared the woman to the nature of the wolf, for the wolf has many other natures as a result of which it is even more similar to love'³⁸ or 'by the nature of one beast you can tell the nature of another'³⁹ — though in the latter he is appealing to one of the more fantastical elements of bestiary tradition according to which the lion resuscitates its cubs, as does the pelican, hoping, in consequence, that his lady (who has brought him to the point of death) will revive him too. The same misfortunes attend the lover as do the dog that returns to its vomit (§ 5, ll. 23–8), the tiger captivated by the mirror (§ 15, ll. 82–91), or the unicorn swooning in a maiden's lap (§ 16, ll. 8–27). In other cases, humans are exhorted to model their behaviour on that of other animals, and it is in this spirit that Richard recommends that his lady imitate birds which brood their young and beseeches her to cherish him as if he were her chick (§§ 30–33). There are very few cases where he recommends that humans differentiate themselves from animals, and here too it is because we are invited us to see fundamental similarities, but ones we would be better advised to shun. Thus he stigmatizes the behaviour of false lovers as being all too like that of the swallow or the hedgehog (§ 24), when we ought to be averse to such practices.

Richard's 'naturalism', in the sense of his understanding human beings in the context of other forms of animate life, is brought out in his extended com-

³⁸ 'Et ne vous emerveilliés pas se j'ai la fame compare a le nature dou leu, car encore a li leus mout d'autres natures par quoi il i a mout gregnour sanlanche d'amour' (*Bestiaire d'amours*, § 5, ll. 28–31).

³⁹ 'par le nature d'une beste set on le nature d'une autre' (*Bestiaire d'amours*, § 19, ll. 4–5).

mentary on the interconnections between the five senses.⁴⁰ It is rather clumsily incorporated into the persona's account of being lulled into oblivion by a blackbird's song (§ 15), its awkwardness underlined by repetition of the catalogue of the five senses, first given in § 15, ll. 7–8, in § 16, ll. 5–6. The core concern of this commentary is to detail how failure in any one sense can be compensated for by greater acuity in another. For example, moles, although blind, possess remarkable hearing, while bees cannot hear but do have an enhanced sense of touch. The passage is significant not only because it implies a knowledge of the convergence of the senses as the Aristotelians present it, but also because the appearance of the same 'nature' in a section on the blackbird and in one dedicated to man implies a narrowing of the gap between human beings and other animals.

It is important to see the *Bestiaire d'amours* as promoting the imagination of resemblance, rather than its knowledge. The resemblances that Richard imagines are often funny; indeed, there is inevitably something slightly hallucinatory about abandoning the hierarchical semiotics of the traditional bestiary to plunge into these imaginary relations where what we imagine about animals may not be so different from what they imagine about us. Aristotelian φαντασία is a broad phenomenon which can include, Aristotle insists, representations that are true or illusory. For immediate sensation is almost never wrong, but the further we get from it as sense data pass through the capacities that mediate between the senses and the intellect, the greater the risk of error. Aristotle summarizes his position at the end of chapter 3 of Book 3 of *De anima*:

Perception of the special objects of sense is never in error or admits the least possible amount of falsehood. Next comes perception that what is incidental to the objects of perception *is* incidental to them: in this case certainly we may be deceived; for while the perception that there is white before us cannot be false, the perception that what is white is this or that may be false. Third comes the perception of the common attributes which accompany the incidental objects to which the special sensibles attach (I mean e.g. of movement and magnitude); it is in respect of these that the greatest amount of sense-illusion is possible.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Beer, 'The New Naturalism of *Le Bestiaire d'amour*', sees this passage as a reflection of Richard's Aristotelianism. Although she retracts this argument in Beer, *Beasts of Love*, p. 54 believing it to be a borrowing from Pierre de Beauvais, it should still stand because in fact the long version of the so-called Pierre de Beauvais borrows the passage from Richard: see *Le Bestiaire: version longue attributée à Pierre de Beauvais*, ed. by Baker, pp. 27 and 230–34.

⁴¹ Aristotle, *De anima*, III. iii; 428b 17–28 (*The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Barnes, pp. 681–62)

In the *versio antiqua* translation:

Because the sensation of those things that are proper [objects of a particular sense] is true or has the least element of falsity. Secondly, the sensation of whatever is accidental, and to what; for here it is possible to be misled. That something is white does not mislead. But identifying this or that as white can be misleading. Thirdly, the sensation of whatever is common and follows on from the accidental aspects in which the proper objects are found. I speak for instance of motion and magnitude, which are [common] accidents of those things we perceive, and concerning which it is easiest for sensation to deceive us.⁴²

Like Aristotle, Richard is all too aware that imagination is liable to delusion, and this gives especial poignancy to his chapters on the monkey, which show particularly clearly how human beings and other animals can be unbalanced or endangered by the way we react to our perceptions. They also underline more than any other the likeness in which we animals are united.

Monkeys

In traditional bestiaries, monkeys figure less prominently than they do in fables. In the branch from which the vernacular adaptations derive, the chapter on monkeys repeats the etymology cited (though not accepted) by Isidore according to which the monkey (*simia*) is so-called because it invites us to see similitude (*similitudo*) with human reason. The monkey's likeness to man is interpreted as an empty, diabolical mockery of man's creation in the likeness (*similitudo*) of God. Bestiary authors divide monkeys into various classes, reserving their worst criticism for the ones with no tails (those we would today call apes). Illustrators represent them as like demons. The only 'nature' or behavioural trait attributed to them confirms their perversity. The female monkey, we are told, gives birth to twin offspring of which she hates one and loves the other. When she is pursued by a hunter, as she runs she snatches up in her arms the one she loves and leaves the other to climb on her back and cling on as best he can. If the hunt persists, however, and she has to run on all fours, she is compelled to release the preferred twin that she holds to her breast, whereas the

⁴² '[...] quod sensus quidem propriorum est verus, aut quam paucissimum habet falsum. Secundo autem est ejus, cui et hæc accident; et hic jam contingit mentiri. Quod enim album, non mentitur. Si autem hoc aliud et aliud, mentitur. Tertio autem communium, et consequentium accidentia, quibus insunt propria. Dico autem ut motus, et magnitudo, accident sensibilibus, circa quæ est maxime jam decipi secundum sensum'. Thomas Aquinas, *In Aristotelis librum de anima commentarium*, ed. by Pirota, p. 221.

ill-favoured one suddenly finds itself much safer; and so the one that she loves is lost and the hated one alone is saved. Among French vernacular bestiaries, Philippe de Thaun's chapter on monkeys occupies only a short passage, most of it condemning the devil (ll. 1889–1914), Gervaise similarly notes monkeys' diabolical character (ll. 361–80), and Guillaume le Clerc underlines it at more length (ll. 1927–1964). Only Pierre de Beauvais deviates from the tradition by reporting that the mother monkey saves the twin she likes best, but this does not prevent him from concluding that apes with no tails are monstrous and diabolical (§ 22).

Richard de Fournival's treatment of monkeys attests to quite different attitudes to resemblance, imitation, and reciprocal imaginings. The first monkey passage occurs early in the text, in § 9. After proposing that love is like a wolf because if the lover is seen to love he loses his voice, whereas if the lady is seen to love first she forfeits her authority over the lover, Richard evokes the viper that is frightened of a naked man but has no fear at all when it sees a man dressed in clothes (§ 7 and Fig. 7). Nakedness is then glossed as the first acquaintance between man and woman, whereas clothing is the confirmed expression of love: when the woman sees a man articulate his love for her, she loses all respect for him. This transition from the wolf to the viper both introduces something characteristically human — clothing — and also insinuates that what it represents is superficial and assumed. Love explicitly declared ('li amours confremee', § 8, l. 7) is something put on ('vestu', § 8, l. 8) by humans to cover their animal bodies, thereby destroying their natural harmony with other animals and exposing themselves to danger. A man in love is a disabled animal, for all he may think himself clad in a human ideal.

Driving home this point, Richard cites the case of the monkey whose nature is that it wants to imitate everything that it sees. Hunters who want to catch a monkey take their shoes off and put them on again in the monkey's sight. They then leave a pair of shoes in the monkey's size so that it will inevitably be tempted to put them on. Before it can take them off again they jump up to seize it; encumbered by unfamiliar footwear the monkey is unable to climb a tree or run away and so is caught. This example is taken by Richard as confirming his reading of the viper:

This example indeed confirms that one should compare the naked man (*l'omme nu*) with one who does not love and the clothed one with the one who loves. Because just as the monkey is free so long as it is barefoot (*nus piés*), and is not captured until it is shod, in the same way man is not imprisoned until he loves.⁴³

⁴³ 'Chis essamples conferme bien c'on doit comparer l'omme nu a chelui qui n'aime mie et

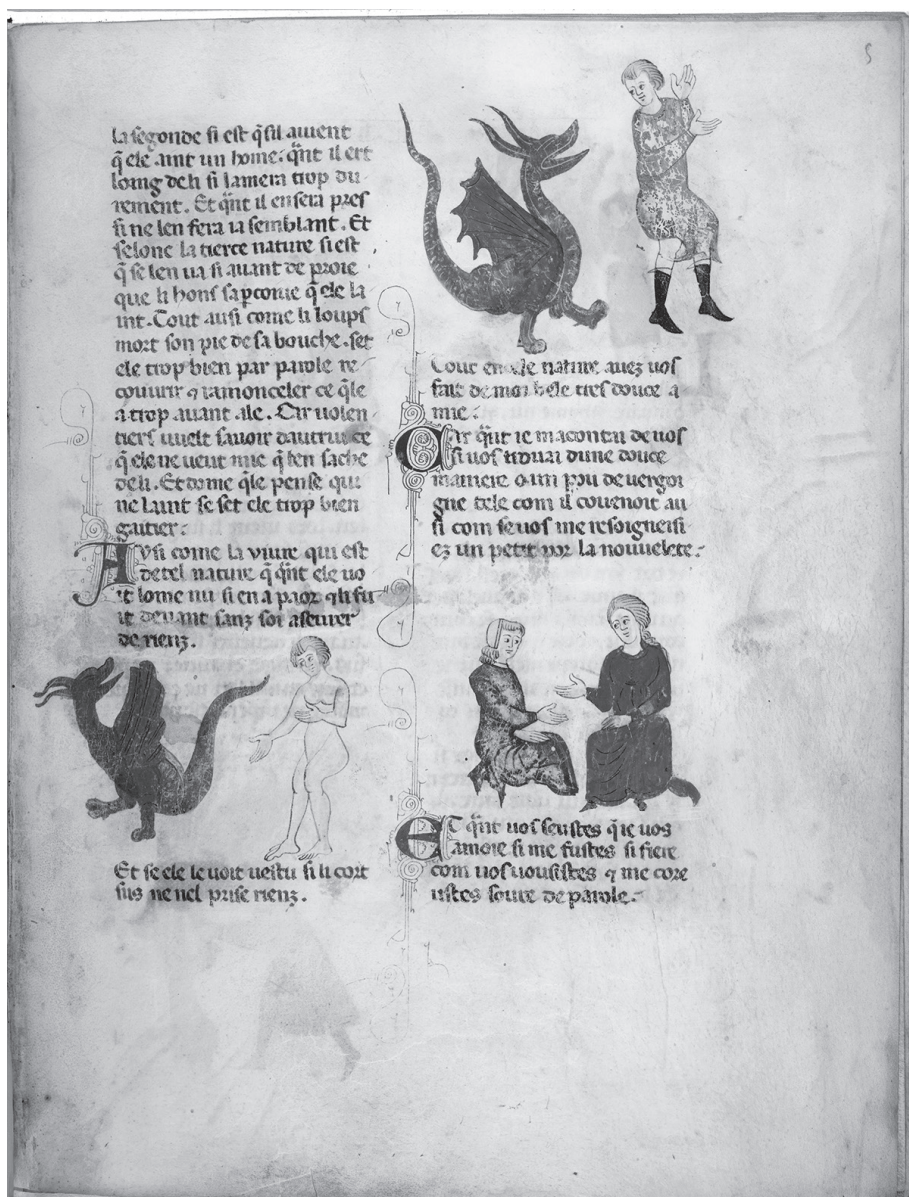


Figure 7. Richard de Fournival, *Bestiaire d'amours*. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 459, fol. 5r. Viper taking fright at a naked man but attacking a man who is clothed; identical experience of a man with a woman.
Reproduced by permission of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

Note the witty reversal of the theme of similitude: rather than the monkey imitating us (by wearing clothes), we would do better to imitate the monkey (by remaining naked); see Fig. 8.⁴⁴

In the second passage involving monkeys the monkey example is again preceded by one involving a viper; again, the monkey's behaviour foregrounds a discrimination that fails of its purpose but may prove useful to Richard and his lady. This is later in the *Bestiaire d'amours*, as Richard transitions from bemoaning his misfortunes in love to casting about for some kind of solution. The animal model for which he reaches in order to gain purchase on his lady is that of motherhood: he will be the baby or the egg, she the nurturer. The theme of parenthood has an inauspicious beginning, however. After describing the hydra, the many heads of which recall indiscrete and philandering lovers (§ 26), Richard warns his lady to avoid such men since they would mistreat her as much as a viper does its parents. The viper's birth, he continues, involves the death of both its progenitors, since the mother conceives by biting off the head of the father and the young are born by eating their way out of the mother. This is like the behaviour of false lovers whose boasts sacrifice to their own vainglory the interests of those who have loved them. Supposing his lady had been inclined to love such a viper, Richard hopes that the outcome will be the same as for the female monkey and her babies. He then rehearses the story of the female monkey and her twins, but in a way that places the emphasis on the bond between the female monkey and her offspring (§ 27). According to him, the mother feels maternal affection for both her babies and wishes to bring them up equally. However, she cannot avoid some degree of discrimination and this inevitably leads to her feeling some preference for one over the other; it is in this sense that, in comparison with this one, she can be said to hate the other (§ 27, ll. 2–6). When the hunter arrives she is devastated and dearly wishes to save both her children; but she cannot do otherwise than clasp her favourite in her arms and have the other clamber onto her back as she runs away on her hind legs. As in the traditional 'nature', with the prolongation of the chase the mother cannot continue to keep hold of the child at her breast because she needs to run on all fours; the child on her back is now the more

le vestu a chelui qui aime. Car aussi con li singes est delivres tant qu'il est nus piés, il n'est pris devant la qu'il se cauche, aussi n'est li hom en prison devant la qu'il aime par amours'. (*Bestiaire d'amours*, § 10, ll. 1–5)

⁴⁴ The combination of the viper with the theme of nudity in this passage ludically reverses the Genesis narrative by making the result of the fall — the demand for human clothing — into its cause.

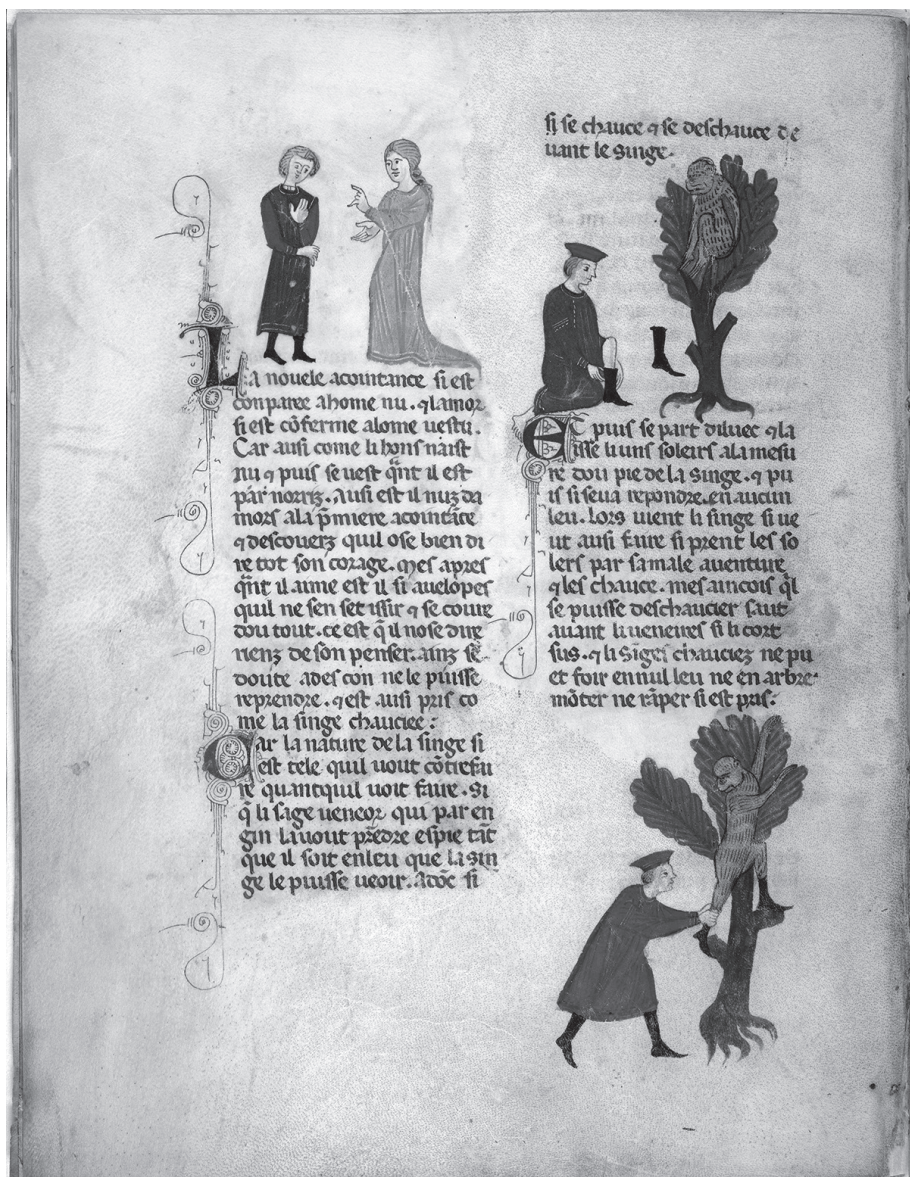


Figure 8. Richard de Fournival, *Bestiaire d'amours*. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 459, fol. 5^v. On the left: continuation of the preceding page (Figure 7).

A man is berated by a woman because he has confessed his love, i.e., he is 'clothed'. Top right: a hunter takes his shoes on and off in order to be imitated by the monkey watching him from the tree; bottom right, when the monkey wears the shoes, he is easily caught.

Reproduced by permission of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

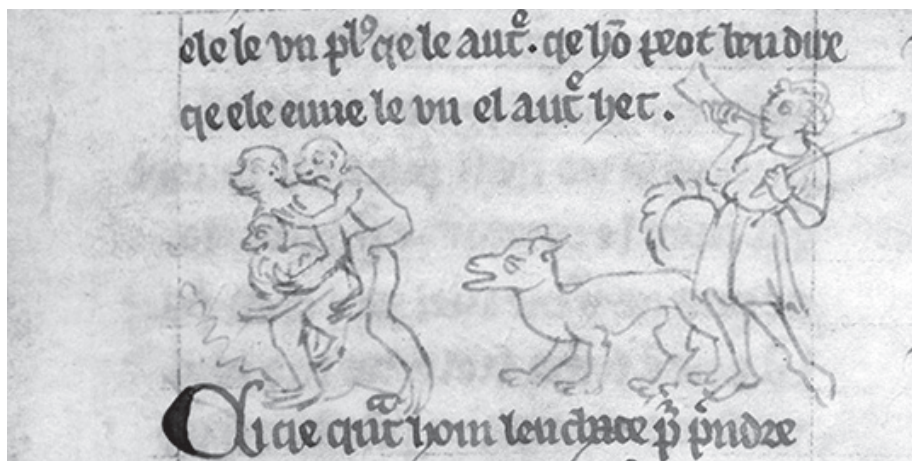


Figure 9. Richard de Fournival, *Bestiaire d'amours*. London, British Library, Harley, MS 273, fol. 78^r.
The mother monkey pursued by the hunter tries to save both her children.
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secure of the two. The story is told as if it were an animal analogue of *Sophie's Choice*; the tone is very far from the condemnation found in other bestiaires, and even illustrators seem to have caught some of its pathos (see Figs 9 and 10). The conclusion is surprising too. Let this be the outcome for his lady, Richard hopes (§ 28), in the event that she prefer to him a swallow, a hedgehog, a hydra, or a viper; for the mother monkey's discrimination between her offspring ends up benefiting the one she loves least. On this model, his love will nevertheless be the one that prevails.

The example is remarkable for the fact that the success Richard hopes for will come about as a result of imitating an animal that apparently fails. The mother monkey's preference backfires as a result of her own judgement, and it is precisely this which fuels Richard's hope of success. He seems to concede that it is impossible to avoid the dysfunction that inevitably dogs the movement of data once they leave the five senses on the complex passage described by Aristotle and Avicenna: as they gather, that is, with indirect sensations in the common sense, are borne by sensory representations into comparisons and discriminations, are ascribed *intentiones* that determine behaviour, and are then stored in the memory and held at the threshold of reason. If the traditional bestiary glosses the great book of nature for erring humanity, Richard de Fournival's bestiary for lovers inserts them in imagination (φαντασία) within the animal skins of the erring creatures from which the pages of the contemporary book were made.

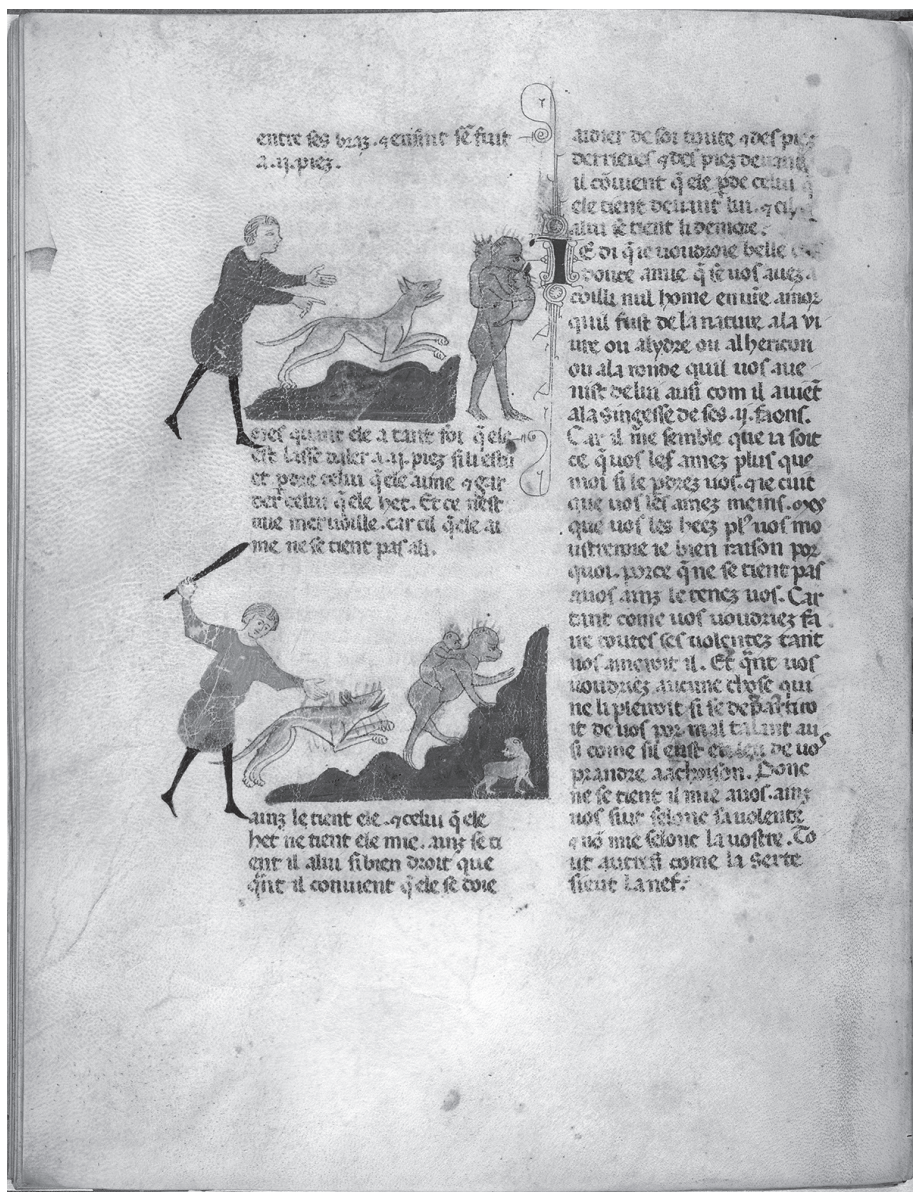


Figure 10. Richard de Fournival, *Bestiaire d'amours*. New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS M 459, fol. 17. The mother monkey tries to save both her children, but the hunter forces her to lose hold of the one she was holding in her forearms. Reproduced by permission of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

Richard's Version of Bêtise

The *Bestiaire d'amours* performs, produces, and represents states less certain than knowledge. Its moves between sensation, perception and delusion are at once delightfully comic and also a seemingly radical and serious experiment in trying to capture something of mental life below the level of thought. The text is always complicated, however, by the fact that while it represents the imaginations, it also unleashes a constant stream of knowing reminiscences: to the *Metaphysics* and the lyric and also (if my argument is correct) to the tradition of Aristotelian psychology. The author's own frequent misremembering of bestiary traditions also provokes readers familiar with those traditions to recall them all the more effectively and then to gauge the extent of Richard's alterations — an effect which it is hard not to see as deliberate.⁴⁵

There are occasions, too, where the gesture of renouncing the human in favour of the animal is strained. Richard seems knowingly to play on the ambiguity of the Old French word *sens* which means both 'sense' as in the external or internal senses and 'sense' as in mind or judgement. The text repeatedly affirms the seeming paradox that the more one remains in the play of the senses, the less sense one has (e.g., § 12, ll. 2–5).⁴⁶ This enables the lover to breathe new life into the old *topos* of 'the loss of reason as a result of love'. Love is like a crow, he protests (§ 12, ll. 1–5), which when it finds a dead man pecks out his eyes and then eats his brains. Later the persona explicitly admits to his lady that Reason is useless to him, since however persuasive his arguments the lady will act in accordance only with her desires and in any case he is too unworthy to be able to put up a reasonable defence of his suit (§ 23, ll. 1–14). Even the power of speech seems of no use to him (§ 37, ll. 15–17) — a remarkable admission with which to conclude what is after all an eloquently contrived text.

Perhaps the sometimes inconsequential way Richard pursues his lady should be read as performing for our amusement his own loss of reason, especially in the later parts of the *Bestiaire d'amours* that seek remedies for love in vengeance or in the lady's yielding.⁴⁷ Chapters 30–33, for example, sustain a hilarious

⁴⁵ As well as flouting the traditional order and meanings of entries, Richard radically alters the bestiary form. Instead of devoting each of his chapters to a particular animal he instead performs a kind of interlace whereby the same beasts, and sometimes the same nature, recur in several chapters in different combinations with other beasts.

⁴⁶ See Beer, *Beasts of Love*, p. 65.

⁴⁷ Compare the observation by Bianciotto in the introduction to his edition of the *Bestiaire d'amours* to the effect that Richard feels it necessary to speak to the imagination, not to reason (pp. 35–36).

comparison between his lady and birds in which laying eggs and sitting on them are compared with inspiring love and retaining it; the lady is exhorted to fulfil her maternal obligations by sitting on the lover (§ 31) who is an egg at the mercy of events (§ 32). This image marks a culmination of the retreat from reason of a text which begins by quoting Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and ends by demanding to be an egg. It is so comical that the *Bestiaire d'amours* risks affirming the value of reason through the *reductio ad absurdum* of its absence.

The similarity between his text and the passage from *De anima* quoted in the introduction to this paper is worth returning to at this point:

And because imaginations remain within and resemble the senses, many animals act in function of them. Some because they have no understanding, like beasts. And some because of the veiling of their intellect by some passion, or illness, or sleep, like men.

Like Aristotle, Richard sometimes sounds more than a little rueful that love makes us more like other animals; assertion of our common ground provokes a move to separate the human. The *Bestiaire d'amours* draws us into the book as if it were our skin, but it nevertheless underlines its status as a high-cultural reading experience. We are encouraged to identify with the psychology of animals while at the same time being reminded that there is a rational life beyond the inward senses. When we know uncertainly through the sensible soul, the skin we are assuming is not really our own but a second skin that can be put on or removed at will. The *Bestiaire d'amours* does not escape the Derridean problematic of *bêtise* but it reconfigures it in a medieval form.

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